Beyond Medieval Europe

# ELITE BYZANTINE KINSHIP, ca. 950–1204

## BLOOD, REPUTATION, AND THE *GENOS*

By
NATHAN LEIDHOLM

Amsterdam University Press

ARC HUMANITIES PRESS

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## Beyond Medieval Europe

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*To my family, καὶ ἐξ αἵματος καὶ ἐξ ἀγχιστείας.*

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# ILLUSTRATIONS

# ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---|---|
| *BMGS* | *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* |
| *BZ* | *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* |
| *DOP* | *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* |
| *GRBS* | *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* |
| *LBG* | Trapp, Erich. *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, besonders des 9.-12. Jahrhunderts*. Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996 |
| *LSJ* | Liddell, H. G., and P. Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Ninth Edition with Revised Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996 |
| *ODB* | *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, ed. Alexander Kazhdan. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991 |
| *PG* | Migne, J. P., ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Graeca*. 161 vols. Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857–89 |
| *REB* | *Révue des études byzantines* |
| Rhalles and Potles | Rhalles, G. A., and M. Potles, eds. *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*. 6 vols. Athens: G. Chartophylakos, 1852–56 |
| Zepos and Zepos | Zepos, Ioannes, and Panagiotes Zepos, eds. *Jus graecoromanum*, 8 vols. Athens: Phēxēs, 1931 |

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**Map 1. The Byzantine Empire, ca. 1042.**

# INTRODUCTION

"BASIL VATATZES [D. 1194], the scion of an undistinguished family (γένους μὲν ἀσήμου), had been honoured with the office of *Domestic of the East* and girded with the ducal command of the Thrakesion theme because he was married to the emperor's second cousin on his father's side."[1] With these words the Byzantine historian Niketas Choniates describes the beginnings of the meteoric rise of the family of Batatzes (alternately written as Vatatzes). Within a single generation, Basil's descendants could be counted among the most politically and socially influential people in Byzantium and its successor states after 1204. By the first few decades of the thirteenth century, the name of Batatzes appeared alongside those of Komnenos, Doukas, and others, whose impeccable nobility had been established and celebrated since at least the eleventh century. Basil's marriage was, according to Choniates, enough to raise his family (*genos*) out of obscurity in a single moment. By joining his family to that of the emperor, however distantly, Batatzes immediately associated himself, his relatives, and his descendants with the most powerful elements of Byzantine society and politics.

Basil's story is emblematic of the way in which Byzantine politics had become family politics by the late twelfth century. Over the course of the previous few centuries, imperial authority had merged with the system of social hierarchy and cultural values of the Byzantine aristocracy, which had themselves been transformed in that same time. Within this system, the *genos* emerged as the cornerstone of aristocratic identity and factional politics.

The Byzantine aristocratic *genos* (γένος, pl. γένη/*genē*) is alternately treated by modern scholars as a western European-style lineage, some kind of nebulous "clan," or is simply left untranslated. Most have viewed it as a kind of amorphous, poorly defined Byzantine "extended family," and have contrasted the *genos* with the *oikos*/household or nuclear family. Despite the fact that it was foundational to the social and political structure of the Byzantine aristocracy from at least the eleventh century, the precise nature of the *genos* as a distinct form of kin group remains relatively unexplored among modern scholarship.

What follows is a study of the *genos* as both a social group and, importantly, a concept. Its purpose is to ascertain the role and function of the Byzantine aristocratic *genos* as a distinct entity, particularly its political and cultural role, as it appears in a variety of sources between the tenth and twelfth centuries. The analysis focuses primarily on the social and political elites of the Byzantine Empire, both because of the nature of the sources and

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1 Niketas Choniates, *History*, 400, ed. Jan A. van Dieten (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1975): Μετ' ού πολὺ δὲ ὁ Βατάτζης Βασίλειος, γένους μὲν ἀσήμου βλαστῶν, διὰ δὲ τὸ εἰς γυναῖκά οἱ γαμετὴν συναφθῆναι τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως πρὸς πατρὸς ἐξανεψιὰν δομέστικος τῆς ἀνατολῆς τιμηθεὶς καὶ τὴν δουκικὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν Θρᾳκησίων ἀναζωσάμενος …; trans. Harry J. Magoulias, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 220.

because many of the structures and ideals associated with the *genos* as kin group pertained primarily, if not exclusively, to them. Even if some aspects of the *genos* were shared by all people in the empire, a central argument of this book, the average peasant farmer probably had a more restricted view of his lineage and extended kin than a member of the Constantinopolitan court in the eleventh century. As in contemporary Western Europe, for the lower social orders in Byzantium, the household probably reigned supreme.[2]

This study will argue that the *genos* was a strictly consanguineous kin group (or at least imagined as such), whose members were thus linked through bonds of shared descent and whose membership was limited to the seventh degree of consanguinity, at least in issues of legal marriage.[3] It was largely immune to change beyond the reproductive act, and adults maintained their identities as members of their natal *genē*, even after marriage. It came to be marked by a surname (family name), at least among the elite, over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, by the end of which the *genos* had become perhaps the single most important marker of collective identity and source of social prestige within the Byzantine aristocracy.

The chronological scope of the book is designed to cover the period in which the *genos* clearly emerged as one of the defining characteristics of the Byzantine aristocracy. It makes no attempt to trace the origins of the *genos* as kin group or of the aristocracy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as such a study would inevitably need to extend far earlier in time than the tenth century. Numerous studies in recent decades have demonstrated that the powerful aristocratic families that so dominate the history of the empire from the late tenth century onward were not an entirely new phenomenon to be contrasted with an earlier Byzantine period, which was defined by upward mobility and the possibilities of social advancement within dominant state structures.[4] Instead, the focus is on the tenth through twelfth centuries, during which time the *genos* as a social and cultural phenomenon is clearly visible in the sources, thereby allowing for a more thorough analysis.[5]

## The Byzantine Aristocracy, ca. 900–1204: An Overview

The development of the *genos* as a distinct form of kin group is inextricably linked with broader developments in the nature of social structures and political power in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium. The concept of a clearly defined lineage or extended

**2** Martin Aurell, "Society," in *The Central Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel Power (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 47.

**3** This is following the Roman tradition of calculating degrees of kinship.

**4** Christine Angelidi, "Family Ties, Bonds of Kinship (9th–11th Centuries)," in *Authority in Byzantium*, ed. Pamela Armstrong (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 155–66; Claudia Ludwig, "Social Mobility in Byzantium? Family Ties in the Middle Byzantine Period," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 233–46; Leslie Brubaker and John Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era (ca. 680–850): A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 573–624.

**5** Jean-Claude Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle)," *Journal des Savants* 2 (2000): 284.

kin group (i.e. *genos*), according to the prevailing model, (re-)appeared in Byzantine aristocratic society around the year 1000 and, by at least the mid-twelfth century, the group began to form the basis of political organization. Prior to the year 1000, it is argued, there is "no evidence of the concept of lineage as a community based on kinship and mutual support."[6] Even then, following this model, the Byzantine *genos* remained a "loose social grouping," lacking in such things as patrilinear descent and communal property holding, and elaborate genealogies tracing shared descent to more distant founders, real or imagined, remained in an "incipient phase."[7]

This model, as it currently exists, fails to grasp the full nature of the aristocratic *genos*, which is the subject of the following chapters. In order for this investigation to be successful, however, the aristocratic kin group must be placed in its proper, historical context. Hence, what follows is a brief survey of the major developments within the Byzantine ruling class from the late ninth through the twelfth centuries.

Though the aristocratic *genos*, with all of its defining features, would not appear in its mature form until the mid-eleventh century, recent work has shown that many of the characteristics associated with the kin group and the aristocracy in which it flourished can be traced at least into the ninth century.[8] The eighth and early ninth centuries, dominated by the first and second periods of Iconoclasm (ca. 727–787 and 814–843), typically appear as something of a break in political and, especially, social historical narratives of the Byzantine Empire. The period functions as a convenient *terminus ante* or *post quem* in Byzantine studies, not only because of the significant religious, political, and social upheaval it witnessed, but also because of the relatively small corpus of written sources to survive from the era. By the second half of the ninth century, at which time sources begin to reappear in substantial numbers, Byzantine society predictably looks substantially different than it had previously.[9]

Though the ninth century is sometimes portrayed as a period in which a largely service aristocracy remained fluid and open to new members, emperors from as early as the 820s ruled, at least in part, through the cooperation of key elements within the provincial aristocracy, especially those originating in central and eastern Anatolia.[10] The

**6** Alexander Kazhdan, ed., *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1230–31. Hereafter cited as *ODB*.

**7** *ODB*, 1231.

**8** Some scholars have even suggested that the origins of the eleventh-century aristocracy should be sought as early as the eighth century, but such claims are difficult to prove. Brubaker and Haldon offer a good review of this scholarship in their exhaustive study of Byzantium in the Iconoclast era. See Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*.

**9** The question of possible continuities between the aristocracy of the pre- and post-Iconoclast eras in Byzantium in many ways runs parallel to similar issues surrounding the early and late years of the Carolingian period in Western Europe. For a recent treatment of the issue, see Brubaker and Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era*, esp. 573–624.

**10** For an excellent discussion of the supposed meritocratic nature of the Byzantine elite in this period, and some of the problems with this characterization, see Ludwig, "Social Mobility in Byzantium? Family Ties in the Middle Byzantine Period," 233–46.

Amorian dynasty (r. 820–867) consistently favoured a group of aristocratic families, mainly of Armenian origin and stemming from Paphlagonia (north-eastern Anatolia). These included the Doukai, Kourkouai, and Skleroi, families whose names would become well known by the early tenth century.[11]

With the appearance of Basil I on the throne in 867, marking the establishment of the long-lived "Macedonian" dynasty, the families of Phokas, Maleïnos, and Argyros, all originating in Cappadocia and/or Charsianon, were, in turn, lifted to the heights of power within the aristocracy in an effort to consolidate imperial power and to gain a foothold of support in the east. The pattern was maintained throughout the tenth century, with both factions of the aristocracy alternately benefiting from imperial support. This created a rivalry between these two factions within the aristocracy, which would last well into the eleventh century.

These families rose to power in large part through the support of the imperial government and the titles, offices, and other privileges that such service entailed. In turn, the emperors relied on the influence of these families to secure their rule in the more distant provinces. The relationship was reciprocal, and the extent to which either group could have exercised their authority without the support of the other continues to be debated. Certainly many of the aristocratic families could boast of wealth and power that was completely independent from the imperial government's influence, and the history of the tenth century is replete with examples of antagonism, including violence, between one or more families and the emperor in Constantinople. Nevertheless, numerous studies have shown that the support of the imperial government, or lack thereof, could and did make or break the fortunes of even the most powerful families.[12]

For much of the tenth century, a small group of powerful families held a near-monopoly on many of the most important military posts in the empire. While several scholars have cautioned against the idea that these families could field private armies of any significant size, members of families like Phokas and Skleros did enjoy widespread support within the military. They were probably aided by the fact that many of the soldiers they commanded (at imperial behest) originated in the same regions as the aristocrats themselves, as well as by the militaristic and pious reputations many of these families had earned. Regional ties were important both in securing the loyalty of troops and in the formation of factions within the aristocracy itself, something that would remain true throughout the eleventh century as well. Most of the time, emperors were able to prevent these divisions from threatening the unity of the empire by incorporating members of the most powerful families within the still robust imperial administration.

**11** Vasiliki Vlysidou, *Αριστοκρατικές οικογένειες καί εξουσία (9ος–10ος αι.): Έρευνες πάνω στα διαδοχικά στάδια αντιμετώπισης της αρμενο-παφλαγονικής και της καππαδοκικής αριστοκρατίας* (Thessaloniki: Ekdoseis Vanias, 2001).

**12** Catherine Holmes, "Political Elites in the Reign of Basil II," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 35–69; Stephen Arnold Kamer, "Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium 976–1081," PhD diss., Harvard University, 1983; Vlysidou, *Αριστοκρατικές οικογένειες καί εξουσία*.

By the last quarter of the tenth century, the Anatolian aristocracy had reached new heights of power and influence, even providing the empire with two rulers, Nikephoros II Phokas (r. 963–969) and his nephew, John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976). Of course, relations between the Anatolian aristocracy and the imperial government were not always cooperative or even peaceful. A flurry of imperial edicts issued between 900 and 996, aimed at curtailing the increasing ascendancy of the so-called "powerful," suggests that these same families increasingly subjugated the provincial peasantry, to the detriment of the imperial fisc.[13] The independent strength of the Anatolian aristocracy was showcased in the successive revolts of Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas between 978 and 989, which nearly brought the imperial government to its knees. The two men were sometimes enemies, sometimes allies during this turbulent decade, exemplifying the complex web of familial politics that so defined the aristocracy of the period. Emperor Basil II was only able to restore order with the help of troops sent by the Kievan Rus'.[14]

Contrary to some older arguments, Basil II did not wage a systematic war against the Anatolian aristocracy as a whole.[15] He did find himself at odds with both the Phokades and the Skleroi, two of the most powerful families of the era, but their loss of power and prestige did not signify the end of the provincial aristocracy writ large. Instead, the work of Catherine Holmes and Stephen Kamer (among others) has shown that his reign is better understood as a kind of changing of the guard within the aristocracy.[16] Those families who were raised to positions of influence during the reign of Basil II, often at the expense of those who had been powerful in the second half of the tenth century, became the serious players of the mid-eleventh century.[17] The long reign of Basil II thus marks a turning point in the fortunes of several families within the Byzantine aristocracy, but his one-time reputation as an autocrat bent on the destruction of non-imperial power in the empire has been proven to be an illusion.

Between the death of Basil II in 1025 and the ascension of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081, the empire was faced with generally ineffective rulers in Constantinople, the loss of territory to outside forces (especially the Seljuq Turks), and internal disruptions within the aristocracy. No fewer than eleven men and two women sat on the imperial throne in just over fifty years. In that same time, there were more than ninety episodes of revolt or internal rebellion, often involving the ascendant aristocracy.[18] Prior to 1056, imperial

**13** This is the so-called "Macedonian" legislation. See Eric McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2000).

**14** This famously led to the conversion of the Rus' to Christianity, at least officially, and the birth of the Varangian Guard, a corps that would act as imperial bodyguards for the following centuries.

**15** Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Bureaucracy and Aristocracies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys, John Haldon, and Robin Cormack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 522.

**16** Holmes, "Political Elites in the Reign of Basil II"; Kamer, "Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium."

**17** Cheynet, "Bureaucracy and Aristocracies," 522.

**18** Jean-Claude Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations à Byzance (963–1210)* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), 38–90.

legitimacy was earned through marriage or other bonds with Zoe and/or Theodora, the last remaining scions of the Macedonian dynasty after the death of Constantine VIII in 1028. After 1056, reigns were secured through a combination of factionalism within the aristocracy and the courting of good will among the masses. Henceforth, imperial legitimacy ceased to be earned by marriage or adoption into the Macedonian dynasty, and instead rested upon the prestige and "nobility" of the new emperor's own *genos*. In this atmosphere, the politics of reputation and effective marriage alliances were essential.

By the mid-eleventh century, not only was the Byzantine aristocracy saturated by the values of the Anatolian elite, including the almost universal employment of family names, this aristocracy also began to close itself off through claims of nobility by blood. Although nobility of blood was never enshrined in Byzantine law, and the ranks of the social and political elite remained open to upward mobility, at least to some extent, until the end of the empire, members of the aristocracy of this period display an increasing awareness of illustrious lineage, a trait that would become vital to social standing and celebrated in numerous forms by the end of the century. A quickening economy in the eleventh century, especially in urban centres, led to the rise of a wealthy merchant class who, from the middle of the century, were also eligible for imperial office and titles for the first time. This encouraged the aristocracy to further differentiate itself from the rest of Byzantine society and to reinforce its internal cohesion through carefully orchestrated marriage strategies.[19] In this increasingly interconnected class, solidarities and rivalries were built upon kinship networks, which functioned precisely because of the solidarity and cohesiveness within the *genos*.

The rise of a powerful Anatolian aristocracy and its increasing influence in imperial politics was accompanied by the transformation, more or less gradual, of elite culture that reflected the particular values of this provincial, largely military aristocracy. Scholars have described what they call the "aristocratization" of Byzantine culture in this period.[20] The most prevalent aspects of this aristocratic culture were the celebration of martial virtues and battlefield prowess, a particularly ascetic brand of Christian devotion, and the importance of the family, in particular the extended family (*genos*), which maintained a unique identity over several generations.

It was once common to describe the politics of the eleventh century in terms of a dichotomous rivalry between the provincial, military aristocracy on the one hand and a younger, largely urban class of civil servants and *nouveaux riches* on the other.[21] Even emperors of this period have been ascribed origins and affiliations in either the "military

**19** Angeliki Laiou, "Family Structure and the Transmission of Property," in *A Social History of Byzantium*, ed. John Haldon (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 59.

**20** Alexander Kazhdan and Ann Wharton Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Alexander Kazhdan and Michael McCormick, "The Social World of the Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), 167–97.

**21** For an excellent summary, see Walter Kaegi, "The Controversy about Bureaucratic and Military Factions," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 19 (1993): 25–34.

aristocracy" (e.g. Isaac I Komnenos, Romanos IV Diogenes) or the "civil aristocracy" (e.g. Constantine X and Michael VII Doukas). In reality, such a division seems never to have existed. Nearly every prominent family in this period could boast of members who held positions in the military, civil administration, and the church. Certainly many different factions did exist, but these were largely based around geography (e.g. Adrianople) and nearly always built upon ties of kinship and/or marriage alliances.[22] In these circumstances, one's *genos* became a kind of calling card, a declaration of one's loyalties, and a cornerstone of identity, both individual and collective.

The ascension to the throne of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081 has sometimes been viewed as the victory of the (military) aristocracy.[23] Though the existence of a separate military aristocracy at this time is doubtful, Alexios did succeed in attaining power by virtue of the support of a coalition of aristocratic families, many of whom were connected to the Komnenoi through marriage. Alexios instituted a series of reforms in the imperial administration, in which members of the extended family (i.e. the *genos*) played an increasingly vital role. Thanks to a number of strategic marriages and an unusually large family, the Komnenoi altered the very nature of the Byzantine aristocracy. For most of the twelfth century and beyond, the *genos* of the Komnenoi and their affines constituted the highest social stratum of the empire.

While the extent to which the governmental reforms of Alexios and his successors might be considered truly revolutionary and the speed with which they were enacted continues to be debated, there is no question that by the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), the entire system of administration and imperial offices and titles had been remade. Under the Komnenian system, emperors effectively ruled through family connections. To be a member of the extended family of the Komnenoi was to be a participant in both the imperial government and in the highest level of the Byzantine aristocracy. Closeness to the ruling couple, either through genealogical or marriage ties, largely determined the internal hierarchy within this imperial elite. Ruling the empire had become a family affair. At the core of the system's effectiveness and cohesion was the *genos*.[24]

The Byzantine Empire experienced a rapid decline in its fortunes and near total collapse in the final decades of the twelfth century, culminating in the capture of Constantinople by forces of the Fourth Crusade in 1204.[25] Political in-fighting and rivalries within the extended imperial kin network weakened the state long before the arrival of the crusaders. Ties of kinship could not prevent such fracturing or individual ambitions. But those families who would go on to dominate the Byzantine rump-states

**22** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 267, 476–77.

**23** Paul Magdalino has singled out the role of the *genos* in the Komnenian reforms of imperial politics. See Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 185.

**24** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 187.

**25** For a recent analysis of this apparent collapse, see Alicia Simpson, ed., *Byzantium, 1180–1204: "The Sad Quarter of a Century?"* (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2015).

in the thirteenth century and, later, the restored empire based in Constantinople had established themselves and their illustrious credentials under the Komnenoi. The loss of the imperial capital in 1204 encouraged and accelerated the rate at which family loyalties and identity based upon one's *genos* moved to the centre of elite culture. Political authority and personal influence were derived largely from one's family for the rest of Byzantium's history.

## Family and Aristocracy in Byzantium: The State of the Field

Alexander Kazhdan once described the family as "the one form of association that flourished in Byzantium."[26] This view, which remained dominant for decades, privileged the nuclear family or household, leading many to the conclusion that Byzantine society was atomized and generally individualistic, at least before the eleventh or twelfth century. Since Kazhdan published these words, there has been an understandable tendency among scholars to move away from kinship as the only important social bond in Byzantium. This move, including claims that the importance of the family in Byzantium was overstated, has been beneficial in many ways, but it should not be taken too far. There were certainly a wide range of other social groups and bonds (notably friendship) that played a vital role within Byzantine society and deserve scholarly attention. Yet, much remains to be discovered and analysed concerning the Byzantine family and kinship, and the fact remains that kinship was among, if not the single, most important and ubiquitous social bond at any period of Byzantine history. One need only look at the language of kinship employed by emperors, monks, and friends to discover the importance Byzantines themselves placed on ties of kinship.[27] Patron-client relationships, teacher-student relationships, and even friendships operated through the constant repetition of kinship terms (most often "father," "son," "brother," or "nephew") precisely because of the strength of such bonds, which the use of these terms evoked.

The study of the family, in all its forms, in Byzantium is still underdeveloped compared with the fields of Ancient Greek, Roman, or Medieval European history, though recent years have seen renewed interest from a multitude of perspectives.[28] Beyond the nuclear family or household, those who have examined Byzantine kinship are typically drawn to the variety of forms that kinship could take in the eastern Roman Empire.[29]

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**26** Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982), 32–33.

**27** Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843–1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Alice-Mary Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *DOP* 44 (1990): 119–29.

**28** Leslie Brubaker, "Preface," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), xx–xxi.

**29** Évelyne Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," in *A History of the Family*, vol. 1: *Distant Worlds, Ancient Worlds*, ed. André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Martine Segalen, and François Zonabend (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 467–88.

In addition to the more standard bonds of consanguinity and affinity, bonds of kinship could be formed through spiritual means (e.g. baptismal sponsorship) or legal adoption, including the adoption of brothers (*adelphopoiia*).[30] Household archaeology and the analytical categories associated with "household societies" (pioneered by Lévi-Strauss) are relatively recent phenomena in anthropology and archaeology, seeking to bring new perspectives to the much older tradition of kinship studies. The changing nature of the aristocracy and its relations with the central government have long been topics of debate in Byzantine studies, yet the *genos* has received comparatively little attention from scholars of the Byzantine family.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, scholarship on the Byzantine aristocracy and the family has closely paralleled developments in the related field of Medieval Studies. George Ostrogorsky proposed a model in which Byzantine society began to exhibit many features of western European feudalism, including the emergence of a more or less closed noble class, around the eleventh century.[31] This model was taken up by several important scholars, most notably Alexander Kazhdan, who added nuance to Ostrogorsky's argument and softened the severity of the social and cultural change supposedly taking place around the turn of the second millennium.[32] Even after Kazhdan's intervention, however, the model closely resembled those for the so-called "feudal revolution" in the West.

Scholars of medieval Europe, especially of medieval France and Germany, have long relied on the conclusions of Georges Duby, who himself drew heavily from the works of Marc Bloch and Karl Schmid, to provide a narrative of social change that includes a seismic shift in dominant family structures among the elite. According to this model, as part and parcel of the widespread political and social shifts occurring in Western Europe around the year 1000, the dominant form of the family among the nobility shifted from a nebulous clan structure (*Sippe*) to a closely defined lineage (*Geschlecht*).[33] These lineages, the argument goes, increasingly favoured male-line, primogeniture inheritance, severely limiting the importance of both younger sons and women in general. At the same time, the European aristocracy gradually closed itself off to the lower social orders

**30** The adoption of an adult as one's "brother," which had its origins in classical Roman law, continued to be practiced throughout the period covered by this study and beyond, even if the practice was frowned upon by many jurists and, especially, clergy.

**31** George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, rev. ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969); George Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*, trans. Henri Grégoire (Brussels: Éditions de l'Institut de Philologie de l'Histoire Orientales et Slaves, 1954).

**32** Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium*; Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*; Alexander Kazhdan, *L'aristocrazia bizantina: dal principio dell'XI alla fine del XII secolo*, trans. Silvia Ronchey (Palermo: Sellerio editore Palermo, 1997).

**33** Karl Schmid, "Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim mittelalterlichen Adel," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 105 (1957): 1–62; Georges Duby, *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dan la région mâconnaise* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1953); Georges Duby and Jacque LeGoff, eds., *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiévale* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1977).

through its emphasis on nobility by blood. By the twelfth century, the nobility defined itself by its unique legal and social privileges and chivalric, distinctly militaristic culture.

Since the 1990s, there has been a general movement away from ideas of the *mutation de l'an mil* (alternately imagined as a transformation, revolution, or something less drastic), or at least a softening of its theses.[34] Rather than a rapid and thorough transformation, scholars have argued that social and cultural change occurred more gradually and unevenly over time and space.[35] Some have even contended that the changes described in Duby's model are little more than a change in the way in which documents were produced and in the nature of their contents.[36]

The historiography covering the Byzantine aristocracy and kinship in the tenth through the twelfth century displays remarkable similarities to its western medieval counterpart. In both fields, the eleventh century looms large as the period in which a supposed transformation of aristocratic family structures, among other things, took place. In Byzantium, as in medieval France and Germany, it is argued, a weak central government allowed for the expansion of the independent power of the aristocracy, who were able to mould the dominant political culture. Militarism came to the fore, as did notions of nobility by blood and the importance of family connections among a continuously shrinking circle of elites. The transition from *Sippe* to *Geschlecht* is ostensibly (and perhaps superficially) mirrored in the development of the Byzantine *genos*. As is the case for Duby's thesis for Western Europe, in Byzantine studies the thesis proposed by Kazhdan and, before him, Ostrogorsky, has been softened and amended, but not replaced.[37] Importantly, these similarities have often led scholars to treat the Byzantine aristocratic *genos* as a western-style lineage without questioning the validity of the comparison. This study approaches the *genos* without any such assumptions.

There are, of course, several important differences between Byzantium and Western Europe, even leaving aside the obvious issues in treating Latin Europe as a monolith. Among the most important, for this study at least, is the nature of the Byzantine government. Byzantium did eventually see some powerful individuals and families collecting revenue that would otherwise have been bound for the state (including, but not necessarily limited to, taxes) in the form of *pronoia* grants, but even these were granted

**34** See, for example, Jonathan R. Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters: The Sibling Bond in German Politics, 1100–1250* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), esp. 1–33, 232–38.

**35** The work of Constance Bouchard is an excellent example of the softening of Duby's arguments and a move toward greater stability and more gradual change. See Constance Bouchard, *Those of My Blood: Creating Noble Families in Medieval Francia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

**36** Daniel Power, "Introduction," in *The Central Middle Ages*, ed. Daniel Power (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.

**37** The similarities between some parts of Western Europe and Byzantium may have become deeper and more widespread at the very end of the twelfth century and, especially, after 1204. Patlagean has produced an excellent study comparing Byzantine society to its western medieval counterpart. See Évelyne Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec: Byzance IXe–XVe siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007).

only by the emperor, and if they were sometimes heritable from one generation to the next (though this was not usually the case), they could still be revoked. Members of the Byzantine aristocracy never achieved the kind of legal authority and independence that characterized the nobility in some parts of the West, even in the twelfth century.

To say that the *genos* played a central role in the Byzantine aristocracy of the eleventh century and later is not a controversial statement. The histories, hagiographies, orations, poetry, and lead seals of the late tenth century onward are full of references to "noble lineages" (εὐγενεῖς γένη). Praise is consistently lavished on individuals for their famous and wealthy family members, past and present. Heritable surnames, as markers of one's *genos*, become ubiquitous by the eleventh century. The political manoeuvring and civil unrest that so dominated Byzantine politics in the late tenth and eleventh centuries consisted of factions largely divided along family lines and built upon family ties. Under the Komnenoi, the *genos* formed the very basis of both the government and of the aristocracy as a whole. All of this has long been recognized by researchers. Still, while the *genos* has played an important role in many studies, the precise nature and role of the *genos* in medieval Byzantine society remains unclear in much of the existing scholarship. The following chapters attempt to address this issue using several different approaches.

Chapter 1

# DEFINING "THE FAMILY" IN BYZANTINE SOURCES AND THE MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Ἔοικεν δὲ μήτε τὸ γένος μήτε τὸ εἶδος ἁπλῶς λέγεσθαι.

It seems that neither *genos* nor species is so called simply.

Porphyry of Tyre, *Isagoge* 1.1.

IN THE PREFACE to the collection *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, Leslie Brubaker cites an oft-quoted passage from the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*'s entry on the family.[1] "Although the family was the fundamental unit of Byzantine society, there was no specific word for it in Byzantine Greek: the most common term *syngeneia* designated both the nuclear family and kinship in general."[2] The Byzantines, however, lacked a *single* word to designate "the family" only because they had *several*.

In addition to *syggeneia* (συγγένεια), terms designating the household (most commonly referred to as the *oikos*) are extremely prevalent throughout Byzantine history. The same is true for collective references to groups of relatives in a broader, albeit vague, grouping (e.g. *syggeneis*). Yet when speaking of the aristocratic family in Byzantium, especially from the tenth century onward, one term in particular stands out, both for its importance in elite society and politics in the period and for its prominence in surviving sources. That term is the *genos* (τὸ γένος, pl. *genē*/γένη).

Modern lexica offer many generalized definitions for the ancient and medieval Greek *genos*, including "family," "clan," "house," and even "race" or "offspring," reflecting the multiple uses to which the term was put. In a medieval Byzantine context, the *genos* was the most common expression of the consanguineous family. The term would eventually denote a much more specific and carefully defined form of aristocratic kin group, which came to dominate social and political relations among the Byzantine elite by the end of the eleventh century.

It is commonly accepted that the *genos* formed a fundamental element of individual and group identity in Byzantium, particularly among the aristocracy. It was inextricably linked to the concept of noble birth, *eugeneia* (εὐγένεια), which appears in the sources with increasing frequency from the late tenth century onwards. The *genos* also formed one of the basic building blocks of political factions in the same period as such factions were increasingly based around familial alliances forged through aristocratic intermarriage. References to a person's *genos* abound in the histories, court oratory, epigrams, and

**1** Leslie Brubaker, "Preface," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), xix.

**2** *ODB*, 776.

lead seals. The *genos* was also the primary form of the family concerned in both marriage and inheritance law, two of the most ubiquitous social institutions in Byzantium for all of its inhabitants. Yet, despite its importance, the *genos* has suffered from a general lack of understanding among modern scholars, with no two researchers seemingly able to agree on a precise definition. Part of the problem lies in the nature of the term itself and the apparent multitude of uses to which it was put by Byzantine authors. Still, it is possible to produce something of a cohesive and (more or less) comprehensive definition of the *genos* as a singular social group based upon shared bonds of kinship.

Most studies of the Byzantine family have focused on the household (*oikos*/οἶκος in Byzantine Greek), which is not without justification. The household was the most important social group for the socialization of children, economic production, and even served as the partial basis of Byzantine taxation. Anthropological models of household economies work well in a Byzantine context, where "balance and survival" are given higher priority than "increase and profit."[3] At its core, the *oikos*/household was a social unit whose cohesion was based upon common ties to a single, physical structure, i.e. the house or estate, and upon the dependence of its members on a singular head of household (*despotes*/δεσπότης).[4] This is reflected in the use of the term *oikos* to designate both the physical structure itself and the social group residing therein.

Byzantium likewise had a rich tradition of recognizing adoptive and spiritual kinship (collectively termed "fictive kinship"), which has generated significant interest among researchers.[5] Byzantine scholars also quickly picked up on advances in the study of friendship, a social bond intimately related with that of kinship, from the pioneering work of Gerd Althoff and other medievalists.[6] Despite these advances, however, much of Byzantine kinship remains poorly understood and only partially covered by the existing historiography. The Byzantine *oikos* often appears in modern studies as a near-synonym of the nuclear family (i.e. a married couple and their children), a concept for which Byzantine Greek had no word.[7] The nuclear family, as modern researchers recognize it, was certainly central in the social life of Byzantines, despite the lack of a specific

**3** Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, "Introduction," in *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and Beyond*, ed. Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

**4** Paul Magdalino, "The Byzantine Aristocratic Oikos," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1984), 92–111.

**5** Ruth Macrides, "Kinship by Arrangement: The Case of Adoption," *DOP* 44 (1990): 109–18; Ruth Macrides, "Substitute Parents and their Children in Byzantium," in *Adoption et fosterage*, ed. Mireille Corbier (Paris: De Boccard, 2000), 307–19.

**6** Gerd Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) (first published in German in 1990); Margaret Mullett, "Byzantium: A Friendly Society?," *Past and Present* 118 (1988): 3–24; Stratis Papaioannou, "Letter-writing," in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 2010), 188–99.

**7** A notable exception to this shortcoming can be found in some of Évelyne Patlagean's work. See esp. Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 472.

word to designate the family as such.[8] Yet its importance, like its association with the *oikos*, has perhaps been exaggerated in the past, with twentieth-century ideals colouring otherwise excellent scholarship on Byzantine family ties.[9]

## Modern Attempts to Define the *Genos*

The *genos* has never been the subject of an entire study. This does not, however, mean that scholars have completely ignored it. On the contrary, the *genos* has made frequent appearances and has even formed an integral component of many arguments, most of them concerning the changing nature of the Byzantine aristocracy. Thus, the *genos* has appeared as central to the emerging sense of nobility by birth in the tenth and eleventh century,[10] the earliest appearances of heritable surnames on lead seals,[11] the governmental reforms of the imperial dynasty of the Komnenoi,[12] the acquisition and maintenance of personal and collective honour,[13] and the motivation and organization of rebellions and usurpations.[14]

Although the *genos* has received a fair amount of attention within the modern corpus of Byzantine studies, its use in such studies is not without issue. *Genos* frequently appears as a shorthand for "extended family" meant to contrast with the nuclear family represented by the household. In studies of kinship networks, *genē* are often used as the individual nodes of these networks, though the nodes themselves are not analysed or their solidarity questioned. The *genos* has been dealt with primarily in studies of Byzantine identity or aristocracy, in which the treatment of the *genos* can at times appear peripheral.[15] In studies of marriage, like in those of kinship networks, the *genos* appears as the individual units linked by marriage alliances, while the nature of the units

**8** Dion Smythe, "Middle Byzantine Family Values and Anna Komnene's Alexiad," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 125–40.

**9** Spyros Stavrakas, "The Byzantine Provincial Elite: A Study in Social Relationships during the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," PhD dissertation (History), University of Chicago, 1978; Kazhdan and Constable, *People and Power in Byzantium*.

**10** Évelyne Patlagean, "Les débuts d'une aristocratie byzantine et le témoinage de l'historiographie: système des noms et liens de parenté aux IX–X siècle," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 23–44.

**11** Paul Stephenson, "A Development in Nomenclature on the Seals of the Byzantine Provincial Aristocracy in the Late 10th Century," *REB* 52 (1994): 187–211.

**12** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

**13** Paul Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi: The Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos," *BMGS* 13 (1989): 183–218.

**14** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*.

**15** A possible exception to this rule is the work of those like Angeliki Laiou, who studied marriage practices among the Byzantine elite. See Angeliki Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté à Byzance aux XIe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris: de Boccard, 1992).

themselves is not questioned.[16] Most often, the *genos* is simply translated using one of several alternatives, a practice Gerhard Lubich has shown to be especially obfuscating in studies of historical kinship.[17]

The *genos*, like many historical designators of kinship, does not easily lend itself to modern analysis. The sources themselves are often vague or even inconsistent in their employment of the term, which is common in the vocabulary of kinship across cultures. In addition to the kind of kin group discussed here, *genos* could connote an ethnic group or "race" (roughly a synonym of *ethnos*), sex or gender, age or generation, or even a class or category of things in the Aristotelian tradition. *Genos* was used not only to describe families, but also the entire human race, Christians as a separate category of people, and even, at times, social classes.[18] If the *genos* as kin group in the eleventh or twelfth century was something different from earlier Byzantine (or Roman) family groups, the word was about as old as the Greek language itself, making origins or change in meaning more difficult to detect. Rhetorical handbooks of those like Menander, dating from Late Antiquity, included the *genos* as an important part of encomiastic speeches, which serves to further obscure changes in meaning over time. At the same time, Byzantine authors placed a high value on *variatio* in their works, meaning a surprising variety of terms are at times used as (near) synonyms of the *genos*, including *genea* (γενεά), *seira* (σειρά), and even *phylon* (φῦλον) or *phamilia* (φαμιλία). Similar issues have long plagued scholars investigating the pre-classical and classical Athenian *genos*, with which the Byzantine concept shared little more than its name,[19] and scholars of medieval Europe wrestling with the Latin *gens*.[20] The *genos* eventually became the focus of aristocratic families who sought to establish themselves as a kind of nobility by birth, but, unlike in parts of the West, this nobility never received any sort of legal definition, and the *genos* itself was never a

**16** See, for example, Christian Settipani, "Les réseaux familiaux dans l'aristocratie byzantine: quelque exemples du VIe au XIe siècle," in *Les réseaux familiaux, Antiquité tardive et Moyen Âge*, ed. Béatrice Caseau (Paris: ACHCByz, 2012), 287–306. See also Vincent Puech, "The Aristocracy and the Empire of Nicaea," in *Identities and Allegiances in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, ed. Judith Herrin and Guillaume Saint-Guillain (Burlington: Ashgate, 2011), 69–79.

**17** Gerhard Lubich, *Verwandtsein: Lesarten einer politisch-sozialen Beziehung im Frühmittelalter (6.–11. Jahrhundert)* (Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2008).

**18** For example, Michael Psellos uses the phrase "the political *genos*" (τὸ πολιτικὸν γένος) to refer to members of the eleventh-century civil bureaucracy. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, 2.146, ed. Diether R. Reinsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015). See also Paul Magdalino, "Justice and Finance in the Byzantine State," in *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), 95.

**19** See, e.g., C. J. Smith, *The Roman Clan: The Gens from Ancient Ideology to Modern Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), esp. chap. 3; Stephen D. Lambert, "The Attic *Genos*," *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 484–89.

**20** Cf. Robert Bartlett's observation that "in the space of one work by one author [William of Malmesbury's twelfth-century *Gesta regum Anglorum*] *gens* can be rendered 'race,' 'nation,' 'people,' 'tribe,' 'stock,' or 'family.' " Robert Bartlett, "Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 44.

legally defined entity in Byzantium, at least not explicitly. The term was so ubiquitous among Byzantine writers that, in most cases, the thought of recording a definition would probably have seemed unnecessary.

Despite these obstacles, the prominent place of the *genos* in many modern arguments means that the concept has not been wholly without attempts to define it. Michael Grünbart, for example, has linked the *genos*, which he translates as *Geschlecht*, to an increasingly clear sense of belonging to a multi-generational lineage, an emerging sense of nobility by birth (*eugeneia*), and marriage into an illustrious family.[21] Paul Magdalino, Évelyne Patlagean, and Jean-Claude Cheynet have come closer than most to arriving at something of a definition of the term. For Magdalino, the *genos* served as both the locus of the preservation of personal honour (at least in the epic tale of *Digenes Akrites*) and as an important factor in the cohesion and functioning of the government of the Komnenian government in the twelfth century. In his discussion of the former, Magdalino offers the following assessment of the *genos*: "The *genos* of relatives (συγγενεῖς) sharing a common great-grandparent was still, within the *patris*, the group in which most people instinctively invested their loyalty and trust, and with which one of the basic qualifications for honourable status—εὐγένεια (lit. 'good birth,' i.e. nobility)—was associated."[22] In the epic tale of *Digenes Akrites*, he argues, the *genos* is "evoked less in terms of ascending genealogy than in terms of a body of close relatives (*syngeneis*), among whom, besides parents and siblings, uncles and grandparents are specified."[23] Again, in the same piece, it is said, "Since no lineage is taken back more than two generations, we can only guess that *syngeneia* extends to second cousins. But whatever the effective limits of the *genos*, cohesion within them is considerable."[24]

In his treatment of the government under Manuel I Komnenos, Magdalino describes the imperial *genos* as simply "the extended imperial family."[25] Though not technically incorrect, statements like these contribute to ideas of the *genos* as a large, amorphous, clan-like kin group. And while it is tempting to use the fairly limited scope of existing genealogies from the Byzantine period (rarely offering ancestors beyond grandparents or great-grandparents) as evidence for the outer limits of a single *genos*, this may be equally misleading. Once again, the *genos* seems to have operated distinctly from such genealogical evidence offered by rhetoricians or historians in Byzantium, even if memory of one's ancestors was a foundational aspect of *genos* identity.

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**21** Michael Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie vom 10. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert* (Munster: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 27–28, 41–43.

**22** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 184.

**23** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 195.

**24** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 195.

**25** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 187. "The Comnenian system identified those interests [private interests of provincial military commanders] more closely by bringing the empire's military command structure within the imperial *genos*, the extended imperial family, and by giving all who belonged to the imperial *genos* a vested interest in the imperial *oikos* and its domain …"

Patlagean's important article on the rise of the middle Byzantine aristocracy offers little more than a translation of *genos* as lineage ("*lignage*"), but one of her more general introductions to the Byzantine family provides slightly more context.[26] In a short review of the language of kinship in Byzantium, Patlagean describes how, in the tenth century, "the old word *genos* returns triumphantly to all kinds of narrative, in the medieval sense of 'kin-group' or 'lineage,' sometimes accompanied by a genealogy going back three generations."[27] The implication, if not exactly argued forcefully, is that the *genos* was limited to those sharing a common ancestor within the previous three generations.

Cheynet has delivered some passing remarks that begin to offer a definition of the *genos* in his work on the Byzantine aristocracy and the advent of heritable surnames. In his study of Byzantine naming practices, Cheynet remarks that the *genos*, in at least some cases from as early as the eighth or ninth centuries, "surpassed the cadre of a single family to embrace several lines/lineages, all of them related."[28] Elsewhere, Cheynet has argued that the concept of *genos* was closely linked not only with a sense of noble ancestry, but also with the glorification of these ancestors as a means of edifying and raising the social currency of the group's living members. Here, he describes the *genos* as a social group with "clear limits," though a precise definition of these limits is not given.[29] These two definitions appear to be contradictory, and they thus illustrate exactly the kinds of difficulties faced by scholars as a result of the lack of clarity surrounding the *genos* as a social and cultural phenomenon.

In addition to studies of the aristocracy, the *genos* has appeared most prominently in studies of Byzantine identity and the concept of "ethnicity." In these studies, the fact that *genos* was also used to designate "family" is typically little more than a footnote. For instance, in Anthony Kaldellis's landmark work on Byzantine identity and the Byzantine relationship with Greek antiquity, the concept of *genos* (especially its use as a near-synonym of *ethnos*) plays a central role and is thus frequently discussed. Still, the closest Kaldellis comes to offering a definition of the *genos* as kin group is found in a passage illustrating the complicated nature of the term in the Greek and Byzantine lexicon. "*Genos* suggested biological relation and often designated one's family, while *phylon* suggested 'race.' Yet both were used by historians interchangeably with the *ethnos* and, beyond ethnography, all three words could also designate any category of things regardless of how they were constituted as a group."[30] One important contribution of Kaldellis's study is the assertion that the single term *genos* could express a variety of ideas, all of

**26** Patlagean, "Les débuts d'une aristocratie Byzantine," 30. "Mais les allusions au lignage (*genos*, *genea*, *seira*) se multiplient."

**27** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 472.

**28** Jean-Claude Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," in *L'anthroponymie. Document de l'histoire sociale des mondes méditerranéens médiévaux*, ed. M. Bourin, J.-M. Martin, and F. Menant (Rome: École française de Rome, 1996), 274. "Le '*génos*' ici dépasserait le cadre d'une seule famille pour embrasser plusieurs lignées, toutes apparentées."

**29** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 256. "L'utilisation progressive des patronymes dénote une certain conscience d'appartenir à un groupe bien délimité …"

**30** Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 87.

them interconnected, yet still distinct. So, as Kaldellis argues, just because an individual might be called a Roman "by *genos*" in the sources "does not mean that the Byzantines considered themselves an ethnic group, only that the individuals in question were at least second-generation Romans."[31]

Gill Page, author of a book-length study of Byzantine identity, argues that the *genos* was "firmly associated with a biological relationship" and could thus denote a family or even a nation, "taking the broadest sense of kinship."[32] While the *genos* as a form of family group receives very little attention, it is significant that Page stresses the biological component inherent in the term. There is ample reason to contend that the *genos*, at least as a kin group, indeed carried a strong sense of shared descent.

Most often, scholars have either reproduced the term without additional comment or offered a simple translation. By far the most frequent translation (other than "family") is that of "lineage" (*lignage*, *Geschlecht*, etc.). Thus, one can read that "the practice [of placing surnames on lead seals] was itself an expression of the ideology of *eugeneia* which was consciously cultivated to promote the image of a particular clan either in competition with rival *gene*, or to promote a sense of common interest between communicating allies."[33] In at least one article both *Sippe* and *Geschlecht* are used interchangeably to translate *genos*, a problematic phenomenon as anyone familiar with the discourse surrounding Karl Schmid's and George Duby's models of social change around the year 1000 can attest.[34] Translations of *genos* as "clan" are especially problematic, though they continue to appear regularly, a trend about which Margaret Mullett expressed concerns already in the 1980s.[35]

## Defining the *Genos*: The Byzantine Sources

Written sources of all kinds produced in Byzantium, especially in the tenth century and later, are littered with uses of the term *genos*. Histories, chronicles, and saints' lives from the period are replete with references to individuals' *genē*, as are letters, court rhetoric, poetry, and even lead seals. Legal sources are useful, though not necessarily representative of social reality at a given moment. Philosophy and medical treatises prove surprisingly helpful in reconstructing the *genos* and Byzantine thought regarding kinship in general.

**31** Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 88.

**32** Gill Page, *Being Byzantine: Greek Identity before the Ottomans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 41.

**33** Stephenson, "A Development in Nomenclature," 209.

**34** Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, "Die Familie Xiphilinos im 11. Jahrhundert: Der Beitrag der Siegel," in *Les réseaux familiaux, Antiquité tardive et Moyen Âge*, ed. Béatrice Caseau (Paris: ACHCByz, 2012), 307–23. For the historiography on the medieval West, see esp. Duby, *La société aux XIe et XIIe siècles dan la région mâconnaise*; Duby and LeGoff, eds., *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiévale*; Schmid, "Zur Problematik von Familie, Sippe und Geschlecht, Haus und Dynastie beim mittelalterlichen Adel," 1–62.

**35** Margaret Mullett, "The 'Disgrace' of the Ex-Basilissa Maria," *Byzantinoslavica* 45 (1984): 211n57.

Narrative sources are, predictably, not especially helpful in determining the structural extent of a single *genos*. In many instances, the term *genos* in these sources carries a certain sense of a somewhat limited group, in particular when mention is made of "the Doukai" or similar collective references identified by a family name. When such language does appear in context, it often refers only to a group of siblings, sometimes including their father or parents. Such references seem much more common for male members of the *genos*, to the exclusion of women, as is the case in one passage from the history written by Michael Attaleiates in the late eleventh century. Attaleiates describes how Emperor Michael V "Kalaphates," upon his ascension to the throne, treated his relatives harshly. While exiling John the Orphanotrophos (Michael's uncle), "the rest, whether they were grown men with a blooming beard or just adolescents, he had castrated. In this way he destroyed his family (*genos*) …"[36]

It may be tempting to interpret passages like this as evidence for a male-dominated *genos*, something akin to the classical Roman *familia*, which was made up of individuals linked to a common, male relative through strictly agnatic descent. There is, however, ample evidence to show that the *genos* was conceived as a cognatic descent group.[37] It is clear from a number of sources that the Byzantine *genos* was heritable through both the female and the male line. This is reflected in Byzantine inheritance law (and practice), as well as in the passage of family names from one generation to another.[38] As is well known, at least one of Anna Komnene's sons carried the family name Komnenos, and, in an *epithalamios* oration (part of wedding ceremonies), is described as a member of the Komnenian *genos*.[39] In a similar vein, one can find numerous examples of people bearing the mother's or even their maternal grandmother's surname. While heritable surnames do not serve as perfect indicators of *genos* affiliation, they were quite clearly linked to the concept. Even Galenic medicine recognized a female contribution to the formation of the foetus, which Galen and his successors understood as a "seed" somewhat akin to the male's semen, a point on which Galen differed from Aristotelian theories.[40]

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**36** Michael Attaleiates, *History*, 4.3, ed. Inmaculada Pérez Martín (Madrid: CSIC, 2002); trans. Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitris Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates: The History*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 16 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2012), 16–20: … τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς ἀκμῆτας καὶ τὸν ἴουλον ἐπανθοῦντας, οὓς δὲ καὶ προσήβους, ἐκτομίας ἀπεργασάμενος· καὶ τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον καταστρέψας …

**37** For a more thorough discussion of this and other issues associated with gender, descent, and the *genos*, see Chapter 4.

**38** See, e.g., Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 473–74.

**39** Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, 340–55, ed. Paul Gautier, *Nicephori Bryennii Historiarum libri quattuor* (Brussels: Byzantion, 1975); Demetrios I. Polemis, *The Doukai: A Contribution to Byzantine Prosopography* (London: Athlone Press, 1968), 113.

**40** Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 117–30. The significance of Galenic medicine for the *genos* is explored more fully in later chapters.

When ancestry is given in Byzantine sources, it rarely goes beyond that individual's grandparents (usually, but not always males).[41] This has sometimes been used to argue that the Byzantines lacked the same sense of genealogy that western Europeans were exhibiting at this point.[42] It is unclear, however, why Byzantine authors would have felt compelled to include more information or would have thought it relevant. Evidence coming from several sources, notably marriage law, suggests that the average Byzantine was well aware of his/her kinsmen (both ancestors and contemporaries) far beyond their grandparents. This is especially true for those among the social and political elites.

Sources that allow female voices to be heard more or less directly, while rare in Byzantium, display a marked tendency for adult women to identify themselves by their natal *genos* rather than by their husband's.[43] For instance, in the preface to the *typikon* of the Convent of the Theotokos Kecharitomene in Constantinople, the founder, Eirene, wife of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, is called by the family name of Doukaina (the feminized form of Doukas), never Komnene.[44] Examples of women bearing their husband's surname (not to be confused with having others ascribe it to them) are extremely rare prior to the end of the eleventh century, and even then they are the exception, not the rule.[45] Combined with the evidence of explicit references to the *genos* by female authors or patrons, the impression is of a *genos* as a distinctly natal kin group that remained stable after marriage, even for women.

In Byzantine rhetoric, the *genos* typically appears simply as the recounting of the subject's (usually more recent) ancestors, often including both the paternal and the maternal lines; other sources, however, make it abundantly clear that the *genos* was not limited solely to deceased relatives, but also included a certain number of contemporaries, what might be called one's "living *genos*." For Menander Rhetor, the Late Antique author credited with composing what would remain the standard "textbook" for rhetorical training throughout Byzantium's history, an individual's *genos* was a vital portion of any encomium (speech of praise), in particular for an encomium addressed to a king or emperor (a βασιλικὸς λόγος). Menander instructs his students that, after the *prooemium* (introduction), the orator should address the emperor's native city or country (*patris*, πατρίς), followed by the subject's "family" (*genos*, γένος).[46] In general,

**41** Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 138–45.

**42** Stavrakas, "The Byzantine Provincial Elite," 68.

**43** Amy Livingstone has come to a similar conclusion in her study of noble families in the Loire region of France. See Amy Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin: Aristocratic Family Life in the Lands of the Loire, 1000–1200* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

**44** For example, Eirene Doukaina's *typikon* of Kecharitomene monastery and Anna Komnene's preface to her will. Papaioannou, "Anna Komnene's Will," 99–121; *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John Thomas and Angela Constantinides Hero, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2000), 664.

**45** Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," 286–87.

**46** *Menander Rhetor*, 78–81, ed. and trans. D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

throughout Menander's work, the *genos* is placed alongside "fatherland" (*patris*) and "nation" (*ethnos*) as signifiers of an individual's virtues as they may have been inherited. That is, *genos*, *ethnos*, and *patris* all conferred upon an individual certain traits and a certain reputation considered to be in-born. Yet, even in Menander, it is clear that *genos* does not refer solely to one's ancestors, but also includes a certain number of living relatives.[47]

Several lexica and etymological works survive from the Byzantine period. The *genos* is almost never included as a separate entry, undoubtedly because of the term's frequent use.[48] One early twelfth-century etymological dictionary, the so-called *Etymologicum Symeonis*, does include an entry for *genos*, though the focus is on etymological roots rather than contemporary usage or the term's full range of meanings. It simply tells the reader that *genos* "comes from [the verb] γείνω, meaning 'to give birth to' (τίκτω)."[49] This entry is not completely without significance, as it clearly links the *genos* with birth, and, thus, with consanguinity. Beyond this short example, however, Byzantine lexica in general prove largely unhelpful in the pursuit of a clear definition of the *genos* from a Byzantine perspective. Luckily, however, not all surviving sources are silent on the matter.

Around the year 1260, Nikephoros Blemmydes, who, among other things, taught philosophy in Nicaea after the conquest of Constantinople by the Latins in 1204, composed a relatively short treatise commonly known as the *Epitome Logica*.[50] The work is effectively a summary and commentary on Porphyry of Tyre's *Isagoge* (lit. "Introduction") and most of Aristotle's philosophy of logic (particularly his *Categories*), and may thus be a rather unusual place to find material for a study of the Byzantine family. The concept of the *genos* as a categorizing principle, however, is central to Porphyry's and Aristotle's works, and it is with a brief discussion of the term's meaning that Blemmydes begins his work. "There are various meanings of [the term] *genos*," he says. "For *genos* signifies the beginning/origin of the birth of every [person], either from their genitor (ἀπὸ τοῦ τεκόντος) or their fatherland (τῆς πατρίδος) … The origin by birth is thus twofold, natural and local (φυσική τε καὶ τοπική); natural is that from the genitor, local from

**47** *Menander Rhetor*, 96–97.

**48** One would not expect commonplace terms in these lexica, which were generally created to aid in the reading of ancient texts or those with a more specialized vocabulary, such as legal works.

**49** *Etymologicum Symeonis*, 15 (Gamma 54), ed. Davide Baldi, Corpus Christianorum Series Graeca 79 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013): Γένος· ἐκ τοῦ γείνω, τοῦ σημαίνοντος τὸ τίκτω, ὡς σθένω σθένος, νείφω νέφος.

**50** Linos Benakis, "Commentaries and Commentators on the Logical Works of Aristotle in Byzantium," in *Gedankenzeichen: Festschrift für Klaus Oehler*, ed. Regina Claussen and Roland Daube-Schakat (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1988), 8. Benakis, one of the leading scholars of Aristotelian logic and philosophy in Byzantium, has this to say about Blemmydes's work: "The [*Epitome Logica*] covers roughly the same ground as the *Isagoge, Categories, De interpretatione, Prior Analytics* and *Sophistici Elenchi* in eleven chapters. Blemmydes's compendium is no brilliant work … But Blemmydes was no mere copyist. He often speaks in the first person and he does so in a way that proves he understood his sources."

the fatherland."[51] This definition is the first of three given by the author in the opening paragraphs of his treatise, following the format of Porphyry's *Isagoge* very closely. Again following Porphyry's model, Blemmydes continues to the second definition. "*Genos* also refers to the group of those [stemming from] a single origin; in this way they share links both toward the first origin and to one another, such as when we might speak of the *genos* of the Jews. For the Jews have a relationship both with the first origin of their birth, namely Judah, from whom they are descended, and with each other [through] kinship."[52] The third and final definition given is of the *genos* as a category in Aristotelian systems ("that under which a species is ordered"), which is Blemmydes's primary concern in the rest of the treatise.[53]

Despite the late date of his work, Blemmydes was drawing on a much older tradition of Byzantine thought, and there is every indication that his definitions would have been recognizable to Byzantine thinkers of the tenth or eleventh century. His aim was to summarize earlier philosophers, not to innovate in the field of Byzantine kinship. For this same reason, it is not surprising that this use of the term *genos* is given rather short shrift. Still, even these few lines of text offer a useful place to begin defining the *genos* as kin group more fully.[54]

Immediately apparent is the emphasis on origins, something that is reflected in the language used by other authors throughout the preceding centuries.[55] For Blemmydes, a person's origins were primarily expressed in two forms: natural, i.e. biological or

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**51** Nikephoros Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, 10.1, ed. J. P. Migne (*PG* 142, 753A). The full text of the passage reads as follows: Τὰ σημαινόμενα τοῦ γένους ὑπάρχει διάφορα. Γένος γὰρ λέγεται καὶ ἡ ἐκάστου τῆς γενέσεως ἀρχὴ, εἴτε ἀπὸ τοῦ τεκόντος, εἴτε ἀπὸ τῆς πατρίδος · ἀπὸ μὲν τοῦ τέκοντος, ὡς ὅταν εἴπωμεν, τὸν Ἰούδαν ἐκ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἔχειν τὸ γένος ἢ ἐκ τοῦ Ἀβραάμ. Ἀπὸ δὲ τῆς πατρίδος, ὡς ὅταν λέγωμεν τὸν Παῦλον Ταρσέα εἶναι τὸ γένος. Ἐκεῖ μὲν γὰρ τὸ γένος εἴτουν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς γενέσεως ὁ Ἀβραάμ καὶ ὁ Ἰσραὴλ, ἐνταῦθα δὲ πάλιν γένος καὶ ἀρχὴ γενέσεως ἡ Ταρσός. Διττὴ τοίνυν ἡ τῆς γενέσεως ἀρχὴ, φυσική τε καὶ τοπική · φυσικὴ μὲν ἡ ἐκ τοῦ τεκόντος, τοπικὴ δὲ ἡ ἐκ τῆς πατρίδος.

**52** Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, 10.2 (*PG* 142, 753A): Λέγεται γένος καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ἀπὸ μιᾶς ἀρχῆς, καθὸ σχέσεως ἔχουσι πρός τε τὴν πρώτην ἀρχὴν καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους αὐτούς ὡς ὅταν λέγωμεν τὸ γένος τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Καὶ γὰρ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι σχέσιν ἔχουσι καὶ πρὸς τὴν πρώτην ἀρχὴν τῆς γενέσεως, ἤγουν τὸν Ἰούδαν, ἐξ οὗ κατάγονται, καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους τὴν τῆς συγγενείας.

**53** Blemmydes, *Epitome Logica*, 10.4 (*PG* 142, 753B): Ἄλλως δὲ λέγεται γένος, ᾧ ὑποτάσσεται τὸ εἶδος, καθ᾽ ὁμοιότητα τῶν εἰρημένων γενῶν. Ἀρχή τε γάρ ἐστι τὸ τοιοῦτον γένος τῶν ὑφ᾽ἑαυτὸ, καὶ περιέχει καὶ πάν τὸ πλῆθος τῶν ὑπ᾽αὐτό.

**54** This is not the first time that Blemmydes's potential utility in the study of the Byzantine family has been recognized. See, e.g., Paris Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie à Byzance," in *Parenté et société dans le monde grec de l'Antiquité à l'âge moderne. Colloque international, Volos (Grèce), 19–20–21 Juin 2003*, ed. Alain Bresson, Marie-Paule Masson, Stravros Perentidis, and Jérôme Wilgaux (Bordeaux: Ausonius Editions, 2006), 271–72. Gounaridis, however, quickly dismisses Blemmydes's definition for his own work because of its Late Antique source.

**55** The *genos* appears most often in descriptions of an individual's ancestry, and it is often used in conjunction with verbs such as "drawn from" or "raised in" or the preposition ἐξ, meaning "from."

genealogical, and local. Such use is confirmed by a wide range of sources, in which an individual's *genos* is described either in terms of kin relations (which could include what we would deem ethnic origins) or in terms of geographic origins (either a village, city, or a larger region). Heritable surnames could express both simultaneously.[56] Over the course of the tenth and eleventh centuries, *genos* seems to have come increasingly to designate solely one's "natural," specifically familial, origins, as expressed in the common pairing of the terms *genos* and *patris*. Hence, for example, in the Byzantine "epic" of *Digenes Akrites* (probably written in the early twelfth century), when the protagonist meets or is met by a new character within the narrative, the first question asked is "Of what *genos*, from what *patris* are you?"[57] A similar pairing appears prominently in the opening passages of the popular *Life of St. Symeon the New Theologian*, produced in the early eleventh century. In the introduction, the reader learns that the account of Symeon's life will include "the advantages that accrued to him from his birth (ἐκ γένους) and his homeland (πατρίδος)."[58]

Significantly, Blemmydes blurs the line between the *genos* as a family group and the *genos* as a nation or people. He uses the Jews to illustrate his definition of *genos* in place of the Heraclids used by Porphyry, but the core principle remains essentially the same. This correlation in Byzantine thought is perhaps more important than has typically been recognized by modern scholars, and one which is explored more fully in the following chapters.[59] The treatise also describes four different kinds of relationships (σχέσεις), the last of which, the bond "by nature," includes the examples both of the link between father and son and between the *genos* and *eidos*. Blemmydes's theories, again following Porphyro-Aristotelian thought, not only associate the *genos* with nature, but also tie the bond of father and son with the *genos*.

The evidence in Blemmydes's work points toward a Byzantine *genos* that should be understood as a specifically natal kin group, a social group defined by its members' shared descent. This reading, seemingly simple as it may be, is not always evident among modern studies. The sentiment is repeated quite clearly by a near-contemporary of Blemmydes, the archbishop of Ochrid Demetrios Chomatenos. Chomatenos's collection of judgments and letters from his time as bishop, known as the *Ponemata Diaphora* ("Various Works"), offers a precious glimpse into both the inner workings of an early thirteenth-century episcopal court and the social lives of the individuals with whom Chomatenos came into contact in his capacity as a judge. Issues of family, particularly marriage and inheritance, play a prominent role in his collection. In one of the bishop's decisions, Chomatenos offers perhaps the clearest indication yet of the link between

**56** This is covered more fully in Chapter 5.

**57** *Digenes Akrites* G 4.320–25, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

**58** Niketas Stethatos, *The Life of Saint Symeon the New Theologian*, 2–3, ed. and trans. Richard P. H. Greenfield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013): … ὅσα τε αὐτῳ ἐκ γένους καὶ πατρίδος ὑπῆρχε πλεονεκτήματα.

**59** See Chapter 2.

consanguinity and the *genos* in a response to Stephan Nemanjić, Grand Zhupan of Serbia. Addressing Stephan's apparent questions regarding marriage impediments, Demetrios explains how the laws and holy canons have established certain prohibitions to marriage based upon consanguinity (ἐξ αἵματος) and affinity (seventh degree for consanguinity, sixth for affinity). Chomatenos then explains that, those "from the same *genos* are called [relatives] by blood, those by marriage [are called relatives] by affinity."[60]

Chomatenos may be especially explicit in linking kinship "by blood" and the concept of the *genos*, but his position was not revolutionary. It was in keeping with a much older tradition within the Byzantine church. From early in its history, canon law defined kinship (συγγένεια/*syggeneia*) as solely "natural kinship," i.e. consanguineous kinship, which depended only on the act of reproduction and was thus completely independent not only from affinity, but also from legal notions of "legitimate" or "illegitimate" offspring.[61] This tradition had a parallel in Byzantine secular law, even if the limited use of the concept of *syggeneia* had largely fallen away by the mid-tenth century or earlier.[62] Yet, even without this point of commonality, and despite the lack of an explicit definition of the *genos* in Byzantine legal sources, one still finds ample material in Byzantine law to confirm and even refine the definitions present in Blemmydes's philosophy and Chomatenos's decisions. One of the most fruitful places to find such information is in the sizeable corpus of surviving material originating with the most well-known secular jurist from eleventh-century Byzantium, Eustathios Romaios.

Eustathios Romaios holds a privileged place in the minds of many modern researchers because of the wealth of information his surviving works contain, especially for their value in reconstructing secular, legal practice in medieval Byzantium.[63] The *Peira*, a unique source from the mid-eleventh century, is a collection of case summaries compiled by a student or pupil of Eustathios Romaios. Eustathios himself had held the position of *Droungarios* of the Watch, i.e. chief judge of the empire.[64] The main source for the *Peira* was almost certainly a collection of Eustathios's legal opinions (known as *hypomnemata*, ὑπομνήματα), which were much lengthier than the summaries presented in the *Peira*.

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**60** Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata Diaphora*, 55.15–25, ed. Günter Prinzing (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2002): ἐξ αἵματος δὲ λέγονται οἱ ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ γένους, ἐξ ἀγχιστείας δὲ οἱ ἀπὸ ἐπιγαμβρείας.

**61** Meletios Apostolopoulos, *To δίκαιον του γάμου της ανατολικής ορθοδόξου εκκλησίας* (Athens: Typois Auges Athenon, 1913), 398. Apostolopoulos's work is a translation from the German, with considerable updates, of Jos Zhishman, *Das Eherecht der orientalischen Kirche* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1864). The canonical tradition especially stressed the importance of "shared blood" (κοινότης τοῦ αἵματος) among kinsmen (συγγενεῖς).

**62** This is clear, for example, in Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 62.4, ed. Ioannes Zepos and Panagiotes Zepos, *Ius graecoromanum*, vol. 4 (Athens: Phēxēs, 1931).

**63** Though Eustathios's knowledge and legal reasoning has been questioned by some modern observers, his skills in the field were recognized by his contemporaries, as he reached the pinnacle of the Byzantine legal establishment by the end of his career. The late Nicholas Oikonomidès respected Eustathios's opinions as they exist in the *Peira*. See Nicolas Oikonomidès, "The 'Peira' of Eustathios Romaios: An Abortive Attempt to Innovate in Byzantine Law," *Fontes Minores* 7 (1986): 191.

**64** Oikonomidès, "The 'Peira' of Eustathios Romaios," 170.

A judge would typically write a *hypomnema* concerning a specific case, which other judges would then review and sign. It would then form the basis of a tribunal's decision (a σημείωμα).[65] At least three such *hypomnemata* written by Eustathios survive in full.[66] Unlike the *Basilika*, the tenth-century law code based largely upon the Justinianic corpus that formed the basis of later Byzantine law, the *Peira* allows the reader to examine specific cases that had come before the judge rather than prescriptive legal precepts. It is not until the thirteenth century that one finds similar sources that survive.

The *Peira* states, "[Know] that those joined in marriage are the originators (γενάρχαι) of affinity (ἀγχιστείας) … since it is recognized by the laws that natural kinship is one [thing], that created by law is something else."[67] The two forms of kinship are thus referred to as "of nature" and "of the law." The text goes on, "and it is easy to see the law/justice of those joined [in marriage], that they are not only the origin of affinity, but also of the *genos*. For a man and woman, united in marriage, constitute affinity toward one another, and a sister-in-law is added to the brother of the husband and a brother-in-law [is created] for the sister of the wife, and further, once children are born, the brothers of both the husband and wife are called uncles of the offspring. Hence a *genos* receives [its] legal origin by obtaining a singular ability for reproduction in more recent times, from the bearing of male and female children."[68] Eustathios then briefly notes the importance of understanding the process of human reproduction for a fuller understanding of kinship.[69]

In this passage, the link between "natural" kinship and the *genos* is unmistakable. This once again reinforces the argument that the *genos* was understood as limited to blood relations, as does Eustathios's tendency to use the term "*genos*" in place of "blood."[70] He

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**65** Oikonomidès, "The 'Peira' of Eustathios Romaios," 177.

**66** See Chapter 3 for a detailed discussion of at least one of these surviving *hypomnemata*.

**67** Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 62.2: Ὅτι τῆς ἀγχισείας γενάρχαι τυγχάνουσιν οἱ συναφθέντες πρὸς γάμον … ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῖς νόμοις ἐγνωσμένον ἐστίν, ὅτι μία μὲν ἐστὶ συγγένεια ἡ φυσική, ἑτέρα δὲ ἡ λεγιτίμα τὴν θέσιν εἰσάγουσα, τὴν ἐκ τῶν δύο τούτων, φύσεώς τε καὶ νόμου …

**68** Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 62.2: καὶ πάρεστιν ὁρᾶν τὸ δίκαιον τῶν συναπτομένων, ὅτι οὐ μόνον ἀγχιστείας ἀλλὰ καὶ γένους ἀρχὴ τυγχάνουσιν. συναπτόμενοι γὰρ ἀνὴρ καὶ γυνὴ ἅμα τῷ γάμῳ τὴν ἀγχιστείαν συνιστῶσιν ἀλλήλοις, καὶ προστίθεται τῷ ἀδελφῷ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἡ νύμφη καὶ τῇ ἀδελφῇ τῆς γυναικὸς ὁ γαμβρός, ἔπειτα γενομένων παίδων οἱ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς καὶ τῆς γυναικὸς ἀδελφοί θεῖοι τῶν τικτομένων λέγονται, κάντεῦθεν γένος νόμιμον ἀρχὴν λαμβάνει τὸ ἐξ ἀῤῥενογονίας καὶ θηλυγονίας μίαν νεωτέροις χρόνοις ἀπενεγκάμενον δύναμιν εἰς διαδοχήν. ὧν τοίνυν τὰ σπέρματα τῆς νομίμης ἀρχὴ γίνονται συγγενείας, οὐκ ἂν ἔγωγε τούτους μηδὲν εἶναι πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἰπεῖν προαχθείην.

**69** Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 62.2: ἐρυθριῶ γὰρ τὸν νόμον διδάσκοντά με μὴ ἄλλως τῶν ἐκ πλαγίου συγγενῶν τοὺς βαθμοὺς μετρεῖν, πρὶν ἐπιστῶ τῷ αἰτίῳ τῆς γεννήσεως, κάκ τούτου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν τοὺς ἀποδιεστῶτας ἑνώσω κλάδους ὥσπερ διὰ μιᾶς ῥίζης. πῶς δ'ἂν τὸν ἄνδρα μὲν καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα [οἰκειώσω] τοῖς ἐκείνων συγγενέσιν, ἀποδιαστήσω δὲ τούτους ἀλλήλων.

**70** For example, in a case of contested marriage, when Eustathios describes the kinship of the individuals involved in the marriage(s) in question, he describes those not related by blood as "those not at all related to these [people] by *genos*" (μὴ κατὰ γένος τούτοις τὸ παράπαν προσηκόντων). G. A. Rhalles and M. Potles, eds., *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, vol. 5 (Athens: G. Chartophylakos, 1855), 342.

repeats this assertion elsewhere in the *Peira* in even more forceful (and simple) terms. "[Know] that kinship (συγγένεια) refers not only to [kinship] by blood, which is called 'natural' (φυσικὴ), but also to that created by law, such as adoption, and a husband is his wife's kinsman (συγγενὴς) not because he shares kinship [with her] by blood, but as kin created by the law."[71] Eustathios clearly understands that the *genos*, governed by nature, operates independently from the law, even if the law has an interest in recognizing and governing various aspects of the relationships created through the "natural" reproduction of the *genos*. While the married couple, as progenitors, are described in the *Peira* as the "originators" of the *genos*, the bond between man and wife is itself beyond the scope of the *genos*. Each spouse maintains his or her natal *genos* even after they have been joined in the eyes of the law. It is significant that the jurist uses the phrase "legal origin" (νόμιμον ἀρχὴν) when discussing the *genos*, since the *genos* does not explicitly receive a legal definition anywhere in the *Basilika*. The apparent inconsistency may be reconciled through the understanding of the *genos* as the singular expression of natural kinship, which did receive numerous rights and privileges enshrined in Byzantine law (most notably in marriage, inheritance, and parental rights). Finally, the short passage in which Eustathios alludes to medical knowledge of human reproduction is much more important than has perhaps been previously recognized. As later chapters will show, Byzantine understandings of human reproduction and physiology played a surprisingly prominent role in determining the social and cultural significance of the *genos* in a number of contexts.[72]

This portion of the *Peira* makes explicit the correlation between kinship "by blood" and "natural" kinship. It also echoes the section of the *Basilika* dealing with intestate death, which describes the tripartite division of natural kinship as "the entire succession of the *genos* of [one dying] intestate."[73] Thus, the "natural kinship" of one part of the *Basilika* is equated with the "*genos*" in another. This is also seen in the tendency, already present in the *Basilika* and even more frequent in the works of canonists and other jurists from the eleventh century onward, to substitute the common phrase "kinship by blood" (συγγένεια ἐξ αἵματος) with kinship "by *genos*" (κατὰ γένος), and to contrast kinship "by *genos*" with that created by marriage (κατὰ γάμον).[74] This appears to confirm yet again the *genos* as a kin group united exclusively through ties of shared descent. The question of structural limits, however, remains.

Though the legal sources tend to be unequivocal in their differentiation between adoptive and "natural" kinship, there is at least one type of surviving adoption formula,

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**71** Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 66.4: Ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ αἰμάτων μόνον ἡ συγγένεια, ἤτις καὶ φυσικὴ λέγεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ νόμῳ δογματισθεῖσα, ὡς ἐπὶ τῆς θέσεως, συγγένεια κέκληται, καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τῆς γυναικὸς συγγενὴς μὲν ἐστίν, οὐ μέντοι ὡς φυσικὴν ἔχων συγγένειαν τὴν ἐξ αἵματος, ἀλλ'ὡς τὴν νόμῳ συνισταμένην συγγένειαν φέρουσαν.

**72** See especially Chapter 4.

**73** *Basilika* 45.3.8 = Nov. 118, ed. H. J. Scheltema and N. van der Wal, vol. 6 (Groningen: Wolters, 1974): Ἐπειδὴ πᾶσα ἡ τοῦ γένους ἐξ ἀδιαθέτου διαδοχὴ τρισὶ γνωρίζεται τάξεσι, τουτέστι τῇ τε τῶν ἀνιόντων καὶ τῇ τῶν κατιόντων καὶ τῇ τῶν ἐκ πλαγίου …

**74** See, for example, *Basilika* 5.2.5, 5.2.9.

between adoptive parent and child, in which the adoptive child is made "an instituted heir (ἔνστατος κληρόνομος) of all our property" and is thus named a "successor to our line (*genos*) and legitimate son."[75] Ruth Macrides makes the point that, without such an explicit contract, the adopted child "was not on the same footing as the blood children of the adoptive family."[76] It is unclear if these formulas, of which only five survive from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, reflect the language or custom of earlier periods, but the fact that inclusion in the adoptive parents' *genos* must be made explicit supports the contention that adoption was considered fundamentally separate from both "natural" kinship and the *genos*.

Taken as a whole, the Byzantine sources argue overwhelmingly for a definition of the *genos* that was restricted to the natal kin group, conforming to the word's etymological roots. Yet definitions like those offered by Blemmydes hold the potential to make each family group very large indeed, since the Byzantines understood the entire human race to be a single *genos* descended from Adam. Blemmydes's use of the Jews illustrates both his definition of the *genos* as family group, and as ethnic group shows that the *genos* as a concept could and did operate on several, very different scales.

One of the most common means by which an individual's *genos* is described in the sources, at least from the eleventh century, is through the use of heritable surnames. Thus, a person might be described as "of the *genos* of the Doukai" or "Xiphilinos by *genos*."[77] Unlike the Roman *gens*, however, the Byzantine *genos* was not necessarily coterminous with those individuals sharing a surname.[78] Nevertheless, Byzantine society did have ways of assigning limits to the natal family.

## The Limits of the *Genos*

The determination of the structural limits of the *genos* consists of two separate components: the calculation of the origin to which members would look and the outer limits of living individuals who might be considered members of the same *genos*. For the former, the Byzantine sources show a considerable degree of flexibility. On one extreme is the human race (τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων), binding all human beings with their ultimate origin with Adam and Eve. On the other end of the spectrum, each new marriage could be considered the beginning of a new *genos*.[79] The outward limits of living individuals who might regard themselves or be regarded by others as members of the same *genos*

**75** Macrides, "Substitute Parents and Their Children," 312.

**76** Macrides, "Substitute Parents and Their Children," 310.

**77** Nicolas Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 101–2, no. 105 (Fogg 546, DO 47.2.1352). A seal belonging to Niketas Xiphilinos, judge and *koiaistor*, dates from 1098. The inscription, on both sides, reads "Do you need to learn? Know that I am *koiaistor* (quaestor) and judge Niketas, Xiphilinos by *genos*" (Χρήζεις μαθεῖν; Γνώριζε κοιαίστωρά με κριτὴν Νικήταν, τὸν Ξιφιλῖνον γένος).

**78** Smith, *The Roman Clan*.

**79** Eustathios Romaios says exactly this in one of his *hypomnemata*. See Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 341–53.

is, perhaps, the more important of the two questions, since shared *genos* membership could result in a considerable number of privileges and affected such issues as the choice of a marriage partner, political alignment, or inheritance rights. Numerous studies have shown the inefficacy of attempts to assign structural frameworks to human kinship too strictly, but the Byzantine sources themselves bear witness to certain *Byzantine* ideas about limits to the natural family. Once again, one of the places where this was done most explicitly was in the law.

Michael Attaleiates offers a useful synopsis of the Byzantine legal concept of kinship in his *Ponema Nomikon*, a summary of Byzantine law intended, among other things, as a resource for students. "Kinship (συγγένεια) is a general term, [and] is divided into three [parts]: ascendants, descendants, and collateral (ἐκ πλαγίου). Ascendants are those who have given birth to us … Descendants are those to whom we have given birth … Collateral [kin] neither gave birth to us, nor were born from us, but share in the same parentage/ancestry and root as us …"[80] This simple tripartite division was at the heart of Byzantine thought concerning (consanguineous) kinship. It was so important, in fact, that it is repeated twice in the *Basilika*, once in the portion of the text dealing with questions of inheritance and again in that pertaining to marriage.[81] The passage also made its way (twice) into the tenth-century *Synopsis Basilicorum*, a shorter, more user-friendly summary of the *Basilika*, compiled shortly after the *Basilika* itself.[82] The portion of text from the *Ponema Nomikon* repeats the text of the *Basilika* more or less verbatim, with one important exception. In the *Basilika*, the section ends with one additional division within collateral kinship. "Collateral kinship is divided into two [parts], those who are related to us along the male line (agnatic) and those by the female [line]" (cognatic, according to Roman law).[83] Attaleiates omits this portion of the text. The distinction between cognatic and agnatic lines of descent was no longer relevant in medieval Byzantium.[84]

Byzantine civil law did not explicitly define the *genos* as kin group, nor did it ever specify any rights or privileges enjoyed by its members. Nevertheless, kin relations did enjoy a number of rights that were enshrined in the laws governing a fairly wide range of issues, especially inheritance rights and marriage. In many of these instances, the

**80** Michael Attaleiates, *Ponema Nomikon*, 19.13, ed. Ioannes Zepos and Panagiotes Zepos, *Ius graecoromanum*, vol. 7 (Athens: Phēxēs, 1931): Ἡ συγγένεια ὄνομά ἐστι γενικόν. Διαιρεῖται δὲ εἰς τρία. Εἰς ἀνιόντας καὶ κατιόντας καὶ τοὺς ἐκ πλαγίου. Καὶ ἀνιόντες μὲν εἰσὶν οἱ ἡμᾶς γεγεννηκότες· οἷον, πατήρ, μήτηρ, πάππος, μάμμη, καὶ οἱ ἔτι τούτων ἀνώτεροι. Κατιόντες δὲ οἱ ἐξ ἡμῶν γεννώμενοι· οἷον, υἱός, θυγάτηρ, ἔγγονος, ἐγγόνη, προέγγονος, προεγγόνη, καὶ οἱ ἔτι τούτων κατώτεροι. Ἐκ πλαγίου δέ, οἱ μήτε ἡμᾶς γεγεννηκότες, μήτε ἐξ ἡμῶν γεννώμενοι, τῆς αὐτῆς δὲ γονῆς καὶ ῥίζας ἡμῖν κεκοινωνηκότες· οἷον, ἀδελφός, ἀδελφή, θεῖος, θεία, ἀνεψιός, ἀνεψιὰ καὶ οἱ ἐκ τούτων κατα γόμενοι.

**81** *Basilika* 28.5 and 45.3.1.

**82** *Synopsis Basilicorum* B.1.1 and B.1.4, ed. Ioannes Zepos and Panagiotes Zepos, *Ius graecoromanum*, vol. 5 (Athens: Phēxēs, 1931), 123–24.

**83** *Basilika* 28.5: ἡ δὲ ἐκ πλαγίου συγγένεια διαιρεῖται εἰς δύο, εἰς τοὺς κατὰ ἀρρενογονίαν καὶ κατὰ θηλυγονίαν ἡμῖν συναπτομένους.

**84** Smith, *The Roman Clan*, 15ff.

law specified the extent to which the rights of the individual family members extended and, thus, in a way, the structural limits of the legally recognized family. Equating these limits with the structural limits of the individual *genos* may appear tenuous at first, but it becomes less so once the link between the *genos* and the legal concept of "natural kinship" (φυσικὴ συγγένεια) has been established.

The definition of parricide (*parricidium*) in Justinian's *Digest*, repeated in the *Basilika*, includes a long list of relatives whose murder constituted parricide. In general, first cousins were the outer limit.[85] First cousins were also, generally speaking, the outer limit of those relatives who could not be forced to act as witnesses against a kinsman.[86] Similarly, first cousins also formed a kind of limit in Byzantine law governing shared ownership, in particular of land. In her own investigations, Laiou never encountered relatives more distant than first cousins in collective ownership of a single property, and evidence suggests that, in the event of the dissolution of collective ownership, the law favoured putting the patrimonial property in the hands of one of the former owners rather than parcelling it out amongst more distant relatives.[87] Thus, in several ways, the law's protection of the rights of a consanguineous kinsman ended at first cousins, which was expressed in legal terms as the fourth degree of kinship.[88] These limits, however, were only effective in the narrow fields specified by individual statutes, and there is nothing to link them with the *genos* per se. The same cannot be said of two other areas of Byzantine law that were deeply concerned with defining the rights and regulations within the family: inheritance and, most importantly, marriage.

Medieval Byzantium inherited from Rome the legal tradition of calculating kinship according to degrees. The number of degrees separating two individuals was found by locating the nearest common ancestor between them, counting up the number of generations from the first person to this common ancestor, then back down to the second.[89] Thus, siblings were related to the second degree, first cousins to the fourth, second cousins to the sixth degree, and so on. This schema was initially used only for calculating consanguineous kinship, though, by the second quarter of the eleventh century, ecclesiastical and legal authorities began to calculate affinity using degrees as well, at least in questions of marriage impediments. It was in this way that the Byzantines established an

**85** Geoffrey S. Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 161.

**86** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 261, 263. Cheynet utilizes both the *Basilika* and the *Peira* as evidence.

**87** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 170.

**88** Of course, there were instances in which the law recognized kin relationships beyond the fourth degree of consanguinity. The *Peira*, for example, offers evidence for the difficulties faced by someone attempting to testify against his father- or brother-in-law, any direct descendant, a nephew or niece, or any child born from his antecedents. See Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 261.

**89** It should be noted that the medieval Byzantine method of calculating degrees of kinship differed from that used in the contemporary West, where degrees were only counted to the first common ancestor. For a more thorough summary of the western European method, see Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 40–42.

order and categorization for kinship that could then be used by jurists and members of the clergy.[90] These degrees of kinship were used primarily in two spheres of law: inheritance in the case of intestate death and marriage prohibitions.

A large number of manuscripts designed to instruct and aid in the calculation of degrees of kinship (sometimes including one or more tables designed to aid the reader) survive, which has led some scholars to argue that the process was a difficult one for many Byzantines to grasp.[91] On the contrary, it is equally plausible that such works survive in these numbers not because of their difficulty but because of their importance to a large proportion of the population. This would have been especially true beginning in the eleventh century, when control of marriage was rapidly becoming a more central concern of the Byzantine church and government.[92] It was also at this time that serious debate erupted amongst the clergy regarding the extension of marriage prohibitions from the sixth degree of consanguinity to the seventh.

By the early eleventh century, Byzantine jurists and clergy seem to have attempted to reach something of a unified theory of the degree to which ties of extended kinship "mattered" in both marriage and inheritance law. This limit was eventually set at the seventh degree of kinship, which amounted to children of second cousins.[93] While the marriage of individuals related to the seventh degree of consanguinity was not legally forbidden until 1166, throughout most of the eleventh and early twelfth century a probable majority within the clergy already viewed it as off limits and ruled as such in their capacity as judges. In fact, this period saw a series of debates over marriage impediments, in which the group of judges and jurists (including clergy) supporting a broad interpretation of the Tome of Sisinnios (sometimes called "Sisinnians") argued that the seventh degree of consanguinity should be included within the limits of incestuous marriage, and, thus, form the outer limits of the singular, natal family.[94] Their interpretation of the law was broader than their opponents (e.g. Michael Skribas), who wanted to interpret the law more strictly and literally. This broader interpretation included harmonizing, among other things, the law regarding intestate inheritance with marriage law, and its proponents drew from Aristotelian philosophy and even Galenic medicine as much as legal precedent.

The participants in these debates over marriage impediments understood them as no less than debates about the nature and extent of the *genos* as the expression of what they called "natural kinship." As such, they deserve a more complete analysis, which appears in a later chapter. For the time being, the most salient point is that the individuals involved in these debates understood them as debates over the limits of the *genos* as

**90** Byzantine sources give a clear sense of distinguishing closer or more distant kin, not entirely dissimilar from modern use, which implies a "natural" origin of more intimate social relationships.

**91** Ludwig Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 165.

**92** For more on this development, see Chapter 3.

**93** It also included the grandchildren of one's parent's first cousin.

**94** See, e.g., Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 161–81.

a singular, natal kin group, and that these limits had been established by nature (φύσις) itself.

Natural law (φυσικὸν νόμιμον) is described in Theophilus the Antecessor's Greek translation of Justinian's *Institutes* as "the law that extends to all animals, whether of the land, of the water or of the air. For Nature did not limit her operation to mankind." Notably, marriage is offered as the prime example of natural law. "Natural law is exemplified in the union of male and female, which we call marriage, and in the rearing and care of their offspring: we see, in fact, not only mankind, but also the rest of the animals reckoned among those that observe this law. For Nature, seeing the animals dying off individually, devised immortality (τὴν ἀθανασίαν τούτοις ἐμηχανήσατο) for them by means of marriage and the consequent procreation of young, their love for their offspring, the rearing of these, and the succession of those in their own room and stead."[95]

The theory of natural law was thus a foundational component of imperial and canon law, especially in the determination of licit and illicit marriages. In support of their position that the seventh degree of kinship constituted an incestuous marriage, many members of the eleventh-century clergy cited Basil of Caesarea's Canon 87.[96] According to Basil, any marriage that would result in the "confusion of names" should be considered off limits. The basis of Basil's theory rests upon the supposition that nature itself had determined the linguistic designations for specific relations in the Greek language. Thus, says Basil, "Those who are blinded by dishonourable lust do not pay heed to nature, which long ago determined the names of the family (τὰς τοῦ γένους προσηγορίας)."[97] For Basil and those following his logic, any marriage that resulted in the "confusion of names" (τὴν σύγχυσιν) contravened nature and was thus not only illicit, but also incestuous.[98] This was the primary, though not the only, argument put forth in the eleventh century in support of prohibiting marriage between those related to the seventh degree of kinship. Much of the literature produced from the late tenth through twelfth centuries regarding prohibited marriages was aimed at finding exactly where nature itself had set the limit. This idea carried immense weight in the debates of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium.

The philosophical definitions of the *genos* offered by Porphyry, Aristotle, and later Byzantine commentators place the group within the series of hierarchical categories originating in nature itself, and there is every indication that those Byzantine authors who used the term in their own histories, hagiographies, or poetry thought of the social

**95** Theophilus Antecessor, *Paraphrase of the Institutes*, 1.2.pr, ed. J. H. A. Lokin et al. (Groningen: Chimaira, 2010): παραδείγματα δὲ τοῦ φυσικοῦ νομίμου ἄρρενός τε καὶ θηλείας συνάφεια, ὅπερ ἡμεῖς γάμον προσαγορεύομεν, καὶ ἡ περὶ τοὺς τεχθέντας ἀνατροφὴ καὶ σπουδή.

**96** The canon originates in Basil's letter to Diadoros, typically given the number 160 in editions of his letter collection.

**97** Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, Ep. 160, 5.1–3, ed. Yves Courtonne, vol. 1 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957): Οἱ δὲ οὐδὲ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν ἀποβλέπουσιν, οἱ τὴν ψυχὴν λημῶντες τῷ πάθει τῆς ἀτιμίας, πάλαι διακρίνασαν τὰς τοῦ γένους προσηγορίας.

**98** Basil of Caesarea, *Letters*, Ep. 160, 5.6: Ἀδελφοὺς αὐτοὺς ἀλλήλων ἢ ἀνεψιοὺς προσεροῦσιν; Ἀμφότερα γὰρ αὐτοῖς προσαρμόσει διὰ τὴν σύγχυσιν.

group in these very same Porphyro-Aristotelian terms. It is not surprising that the *genos*, then, lacked a legal definition as such, since it was understood as fundamentally different from expressly *legal* kinship (the legitimacy of children, slave or free status, adoption, inheritance rights, etc.). With nature at the heart of the *genos*, this may have even served to strengthen the bonds among those sharing a *genos*, at least relative to other forms of social bonds or even other forms of kinship. This very idea, in fact, was argued by several jurists and bishops during the eleventh- and twelfth-century debates surrounding the extension of marriage impediments, as later chapters will demonstrate.

The fields of Aristotelian philosophy, medicine, theology, and law, while perhaps inaccessible to the majority of the Byzantine population at any given moment, were nevertheless widely read and understood, often by the very same individuals who composed the histories and other works used by modern historians to construct their narratives of social and cultural change in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium. Some of the most important commentaries on classical philosophy (as well as other classical Greek and Roman works) were composed by clergymen, especially bishops, who were the same individuals charged with formulating the church's position on marriage impediments and, importantly, the theories behind it.

The apparent consistencies described in the pages above are more than just the creative editing of a modern scholar and are, in fact, a product of the particular Byzantine *milieux* that produced the men and women behind the written sources. Thus, debates carried out by senior clergy members concerning the limits of the singular family (*genos*) or the multifarious definitions of *genos* in commentaries on Porphyry's *Isagoge* should not be relegated to small circles of specialists on the fringes of Byzantine society in the tenth through twelfth centuries. On the contrary, it was in these fields that the nature of kinship and the family was (re-)negotiated and debated, and these debates had very real consequences for people of all social strata, particularly in questions of marriage and inheritance.

## Conclusion

The composite image formed by combining the various and, at times, partial definitions of the *genos* discussed here is not only internally consistent, it is also consistent with the concept's use outside of the realm of philosophy and law. Unlike the term *syggenēs*/*syggeneia*, which was restricted to consanguineous kin in canon and (most) civil law, but could include affinal and even adopted or spiritual kin in other contexts, there does not appear to be any contradiction to this definition of the *genos* in, for example, narrative histories or hagiography from the same period.[99] Above all, it is clear that Byzantine

**99** This is, of course, only true for the use of *genos* indicating a family group. When the term *genos* is used by Byzantine sources to indicate a group or class of individuals or things sharing certain common traits, such as Michael Psellos's use of "*politikon genos*" (contrasted with the "senatorial *genos*"), it is another matter entirely. See Psellos, *Chronographia*, 2.146; Magdalino, "Justice and Finance in the Byzantine State," 95.

authors had a clear sense of the *genos* as a form of family group, with a specific set of cultural associations and certain limits, at least in some contexts.

Following these sources, the Byzantine *genos* was a kin group comprising living individuals and their ancestors extending well beyond the individual household and operating independently from it. It was a consanguineous kin group, displaying many of the qualities of a lineage as described by Jack Goody, though, unlike the western European "houses" used by Goody, the Byzantine aristocratic *genos* does not seem to have derived its unique identity through its connection to "a landed estate, claims to office, titles or other relatively exclusive rights."[100] Instead, the focus of the *genos*'s cohesion rested more squarely in ties of blood and the family's collective reputation, enshrined in the family name. Though the individual identification with a given *genos* certainly entailed a certain degree of recognition of one's ancestors and was, partially at least, dependent upon this recognition, extensive genealogies are rare in surviving Byzantine sources, making the *genos* appear to be a more "ego-oriented" descent system than an "ancestor-focused" one.[101]

Put another way, the *genos* was the Byzantine expression of the natural (biological) family. According to Byzantine thinking, it was governed by "nature" (*physis*), which left it beyond the reach of most potential innovations or restrictions; as such, it was largely immune to alteration through adoption, marriage, or spiritual kinship (though the union of husband and wife was up for debate for a short time in the twelfth century). There were, however, some attempts to redefine its limits, at least as far as the *genos* was identical to the natural family (φυσικὴ συγγένεια) as it appeared in Byzantine law and religious thinking concerning marriage and inheritance in cases of intestate death. This meant that the *genos* was the primary form of the family involved in questions of marriage law, making it of unquestionable importance in the lives of nearly every individual in medieval Byzantium, at least in theory.

Heritable surnames were most certainly the primary indicators (or at least the most visible one) of an individual's *genos*, but they cannot be said to have determined an individual *genos*'s size. The Byzantine *genos* was not an agnatic kin group, and the older Roman concept of *paterfamilias* had fallen out of use long before the tenth century. Any limits to the *genos* seem to have operated regardless of gender, even if there were some within Byzantine society who understood the female line of descent to be somehow less legitimate than the male or even having a polluting effect on the intergenerational reproduction of the *genos*.[102]

The basic definition of the *genos* remained generally stable throughout the period in question (and indeed for a much longer period than that, reaching back into antiquity). The *genos* as defined by Blemmydes in the thirteenth century would have been recognizable to a Byzantine in the ninth. The difference lies in the importance placed on one's

**100** Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 227–28.

**101** Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, 231–32.

**102** See Chapter 4 for a more complete discussion of this trend. See also Smith, *The Roman Clan*, 15.

*genos* as a determining factor in individual identity and social and political status. The eleventh century was something of a turning point, both in the noble identity of the Byzantine aristocracy and in the intensity of debate surrounding marriage impediments; Laiou has argued for a link between the two, which appears to find support in the sources.[103] Byzantine thinkers of the eleventh century and later worked to give the *genos* more clearly defined limits as it became a more important social group and a more powerful means of differentiating one group or even one individual from another. The appearance of heritable surnames contributed to such functions as very visible indicators of one's membership in a given *genos* and, at the same time, helped each individual *genos* develop a unique identity of its own over several generations. The legal sources also suggest that the *genos* should not be viewed as a uniquely aristocratic phenomenon at all, as even a peasant farmer would have been subject to the same restrictions concerning marriage and would have had an answer to the question "of what *genos* are you?"

Attempts to find a precise relationship between the *genos* and the *oikos* or related concepts have largely been in vain. The distinction between them is by no means clear in many Byzantine texts, and the two can at times appear to be used alternately as rough synonyms. The difference may perhaps be explored more fruitfully as one of emphasis. The *oikos* consisted of a group of individuals linked first and foremost by their shared living space and their common link to a single head of the household. The *genos*, on the other hand, emphasized the groups shared links of descent. It is true that, in many cases, *oikos* is used by Byzantine authors to denote a group of people without any direct reference to their living situation, but the bonds within the group were at least partially formed by identifying their interests with a household as a physical space. In sum, the difference between the *oikos* and the *genos* may perhaps be expressed most clearly by stating that the *oikos* was a social group whose members might include any number of slaves or other hangers-on who looked to a singular head of household, while the *genos* was a social group whose ties were strictly imagined as those of blood, which transcended physical space and lacked a formal leader.

As with many terms and concepts related to kinship, it is probably a mistake to assign strict limits to *genos* membership or to define it too narrowly outside of Byzantine law. Problems arise when one tries to identify the absolute limits of the *genos* at the seventh degree of kinship, most notably an individual's distant ancestors and third cousins, both of which were almost certainly considered part of a person's *genos*, at least at certain times, and both of which exceeded the seventh degree of kinship (third cousins were related to the eighth degree). It is equally impossible to map those sharing the same surname onto the *genos* found in Byzantine law, especially since it was not unusual to find a son bearing a different family name than his own father. Still, it can be useful to regard these structural limits as important to Byzantine thinking regarding shared blood and its implications, while more distant relatives could still lend political or other kinds of support or, in the case of long-dead ancestors, could still lend legitimacy and authority in claims of political or social prestige.

**103** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 21–25.

Chapter 2

# THE LANGUAGE OF KINSHIP

> Τίμιος ὁ θάνατος ἀληθῶς τῶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ γένους καὶ τοῦ φύλου χριστιανῶν τετελευτηκότων ἐν δεσμοῖς καὶ πολέμοις, ὧν σήμερον τὴν μνήμην ἐπιτελοῦμ εν πιστῶς.
>
> Truly honourable is the death of those who have fallen in captivity and in wars on behalf of the *genos* and the nation of Christians, whose memory we faithfully celebrate today.
>
> Tenth-century office (*akolouthia*) for those who have died in battle[1]

BY THE MIDDLE of the twelfth century, the *genos* played a much greater role in Byzantine politics and aristocratic society than it had two centuries earlier. The process by which the concept moved to the centre of aristocratic identity is particularly visible in the language of the sources. At the same time, changes associated with the definition and role of the term *genos* between the early tenth and the late twelfth centuries were accompanied by other, more sweeping changes in the vocabulary of kinship occurring in Byzantine society. The nature of these developments sheds valuable light on the changing social and cultural significance of the *genos* and of kinship more broadly.

The tenth and eleventh centuries were marked by important changes in the vocabulary of kinship employed by the sources.[2] The period witnessed the language of kinship becoming much more precise than it had previously been, while authors also display much more interest in recording kin relations in their works, whether using older or newer vocabulary to do so. The language of adoption and even baptism became more firmly linked in language and significance, while affinal relationships gained new vocabulary to reflect their growing significance in marriage alliances and social relations.[3] Importantly, the *genos* and its related vocabulary appears with much greater frequency as the period covered here progresses, in many cases taking precedence over other forms of "the family." At the same time, a specific vocabulary for describing the *genos* came to be widely recognized and utilized, with certain sets of assumptions and valuations encoded within it.

The *genos* gradually earned a central role in the Byzantine vocabulary of kinship, and, as part of this process, the specific language of the *genos* achieved near-codification,

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**1** Th. Détorakis and J. Mossay, eds., "Un office byzantin inédit pour ceux qui sont morts à la guerre, dans le Cod. Sin. Gr. 734–735," *Le Muséon* 101 (1988): 204, lines 315–16.

**2** Ruth Macrides, "Families and Kinship," in *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 652–60.

**3** Macrides, "Families and Kinship," 653–54.

both in the use of the term itself and in the language associated with it. At the same time, the use of the term *genos* to designate both ethnic groups and kin groups was not a meaningless correlation. Instead, there was a certain degree of conceptual overlap among the different uses of the *genos*, which carried real significance, especially concerning the *genos* as an identity-set and as the locus of primary loyalties. The *genos*, on whatever scale, appears as the strongest and most meaningful marker of group solidarity and collective identity in medieval Byzantine sources. More broadly, changes in the vocabulary of kinship are indicative of broader social and cultural changes.

The analysis of the vocabulary of kinship has long been used as a tool in anthropology, in particular for determining variations in kinship systems and the relative importance of various kinship distinctions.[4] In these studies, the language of kinship is usually divided into two categories: forms of address and terms of reference.[5] The subject of this chapter is the latter.[6] The space of a single chapter is not nearly sufficient for a comprehensive discussion of the entire range of the vocabulary of kinship in medieval Byzantine Greek, and this chapter accordingly makes no claims to total coverage in this sense. More general overviews may be found in several books and published articles, most notably by Évelyne Patlagean.[7]

## Overview of the Byzantine Vocabulary of Kinship and Linguistic Change

A linguistic approach to Byzantine sources is admittedly fraught with difficulties. While both the written and the spoken language changed over time, and while this change certainly reflected other social and/or cultural shifts, there were numerous other influences and phenomena that serve to mask the precise relationship between linguistic and socio-cultural change in a Byzantine context. Byzantine authors, for example, were heavily influenced by ancient Greek texts emanating especially from classical Athens and imperial Rome. This influence was largely responsible for the diglossia that existed throughout Byzantium's existence, in which the written word often differed considerably from the spoken Greek used in daily interactions.[8]

**4** Jérôme Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," in *Parenté et société dans le monde grec de l'Antiquité à l'âge moderne. Colloque international, Volos (Grèce), 19–20–21 Juin 2003*, ed. Alain Bresson, Marie-Paule Masson, Stavros Perentidis, and Jérôme Wilgaux (Bordeaux: Diffusion de Boccard, 2006), 209–34.

**5** Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 210.

**6** For an excellent study of Byzantine forms of address, see Michael Grünbart, *Formen der Anrede in byzantinischen Briefe vom 6. bis zum 12. Jahrhundert* (Vienna: VÖAW, 2005).

**7** Patlagean, "Les débuts d'une aristocratie byzantine," 23–43; Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium"; Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, esp. 83–163; Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté."

**8** In Byzantium, it is probably more accurate to speak of a polyglossia rather than a diglossia. At any point, especially from the mid-eleventh century and later, written sources could display a number of characteristics more or less influenced by Attic Greek and/or biblical Koine.

One need not look far in medieval Byzantine sources for evidence of the pervasive influence more ancient Greek and Roman literature had on its content, including vocabulary. The conventions of Greek rhetoric and rhetorical training deeply affected the language of medieval Byzantine sources, sometimes giving the impression of a language nearly unchanged since classical antiquity.[9] The active use of the term *adelphidous* (ἀδελφιδοῦς) to indicate a nephew was largely abandoned in the spoken language of the middle and late Byzantine periods in favour of *anepsios* (ἀνεψιός).[10] *Adelphidous* and similar forms, however, continued to be found in Byzantine writing, especially during the Komnenian period (ca. 1081–1185).[11] This reflects the greater influence of Attic Greek and classical literature on the learned, written language at this time, rather than a societal shift in kinship structures. Phrases denoting ideas of the foundation or founders of a *genos* also display clear dependence on more ancient precedents.[12]

It is also a fact of Byzantine literature that many authors prided themselves on the concoction of new terms, which might in turn be borrowed by other authors. Uniqueness and creativity could actually be admirable qualities in an otherwise very conservative literary and rhetorical tradition.[13] So, in an inscription from the twelfth century, the *Grand Hetaireiarch* George Palaiologos claimed to be the descendant of the Doukai and Komnenoi by styling himself the descendant of *autokratoreggonoi*, literally "imperial grandsons" (ἐκ Κομνηνοδουκῶν αὐτοκρατορεγγόνων).[14] A thorough scouring of the sources produced in the two and a half centuries covered by this study would produce a dizzying array of such creative combinations. In some cases at least, the vocabulary choices made by Byzantine authors were largely dictated by rhetorical concerns, especially *variatio* and *etho-* or *prosopopoiia*.

Finally, the twelfth century also witnessed the beginnings of some literature in the vernacular (or closer to the vernacular) in Byzantium, especially in poetry.[15] The earliest surviving versions of the tale of *Digenes Akrites* (dating to the early twelfth century) preserve a curious mixture of forms, syntax, and vocabulary that includes both

**9** Michael Jeffreys, " 'Rhetorical' Texts," in *Rhetoric in Byzantium. Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 89.

**10** Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 231.

**11** The word appears at least six times in Niketas Choniates's *History*, for example.

**12** For more on this, see below (page 53).

**13** Erich Trapp, "The Role of Vocabulary in Byzantine Rhetoric as a Stylistic Device," in *Rhetoric in Byantium. Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 137–49, esp. 138–39.

**14** Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie à Byzance," 275; Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Pictorial Propaganda in XIIth c. Constantinople," *Glas 390 de l'Académie serbe des sciences et des arts. Class des sciences historiques* 11 (Belgrade, 2001): 93–102.

**15** Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 83–86; Erich Trapp, "Learned and Vernacular Literature in Byzantium," *DOP* 47 (1993): 115–29.

remarkably modern elements alongside decidedly Homeric terms.[16] This development, which expanded the range of linguistic options available to Byzantine writers, further muddies our image of linguistic change over time.

All of these factors serve to complicate the study of the Byzantine language of kinship, especially one that attempts to draw correlations between linguistic and social or cultural change more broadly. Still, such obstacles are not insurmountable, and despite the apparent difficulties, there is much to learn from a close examination of the language used by surviving sources. Gerhard Lubich's study of kinship terminology in western medieval sources, mostly from Carolingian and Ottonian Europe, has shown not only the negative, obfuscating effects of assigning modern terms and behavioural assumptions to medieval concepts of kinship in their various forms; his work has also demonstrated that it is possible to use a close analysis of this medieval vocabulary of kinship to produce a more nuanced picture of political, social, and cultural change.[17]

Linguistic change, like social change associated with kinship structures, tends to be slow. Significant change did occur in the Greek vocabulary for kinship over the course of the Byzantine millennium, but it was neither sudden nor revolutionary. Be that as it may, the tenth and eleventh centuries in particular witnessed rather more rapid and significant change than almost any other in Byzantine history. Jérôme Wilgaux, who studied long-term changes in the Greek vocabulary of kinship, identifies the tenth through twelfth centuries in Byzantium as a crucial period, marking a break with the Late Antique and early medieval periods of linguistic development.[18] By the eleventh century, Byzantine society had at its disposal a complex vocabulary for kinship that could account for relations out to the eighth degree of kinship (following Romano-Byzantine reckoning).[19] Many such terms for more distant relatives rarely appear in sources outside of a legal context, but they existed nonetheless.

Change in this vocabulary occurred largely among the indicators of more distant relatives, especially collateral.[20] Wilgaux identifies two important shifts over the nearly three millennia covered by his study: the loss of bifurcation (taking account of the sex of the intervening relative between Ego and Alter) and the evolution of the term *anepsios* (ἀνεψιός), which lost its sense as "cousin."[21] He also notes the relatively fluid and changeable nature of terms for affinity and more generic indicators of

**16** Elizabeth Jeffreys, ed. and trans., *Digenis Akritis: The Grottaferrata and Escorial Versions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xli–lvi, passim.

**17** Lubich, *Verwandtsein*.

**18** Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 211–12. Wilgaux contends that the most formative period of change in fact occurred between the first and third centuries CE.

**19** For a list of these technical terms, see Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 232–33. The eighth degree of consanguinity is the equivalent of third cousins, *trisexadelphos* (τρισεξάδελφος) in Byzantine Greek.

**20** Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 217.

**21** Already by the tenth century, *exadelphos* (ἑξάδελφος) had largely replaced the classical *anepsios* as denoting a cousin, even if various alternatives continued to appear.

kinship.[22] In medieval Byzantium, two additional themes can be identified: the addition of new designators for affinal relationships that emphasize the alliance among *genē* created by marriage and the proliferation (and invention) of various terms that emphasize the sibling bond and shared blood through the use of such terms as *homaimos* (ὅμαιμος) or *synaimos* (σύναιμος) to signify consanguineous kin, usually siblings.[23] This is, of course, in addition to perhaps the most notable trend in the language of kinship from the mid-tenth century onward, represented by the use of the term *genos* itself. In general, there is marked increase in the attention paid to relationships of kinship in sources of all kinds and an ever greater precision in the indication of these relationships.[24]

Many of the additions to the medieval Greek vocabulary of kinship were related to affinity, i.e. kinship through marriage. This may be related to the increasingly political nature of marriage, particularly among the aristocracy, as marriages within the social elite took on an ever greater importance as solidifiers of inter-familial alliances.[25] Yet if affinal relationships were viewed as more instrumental in the web of social and political bonds in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there was a concomitant interest in specifying the precise nature of an individual's relationship to another (relatives "on the mother's side," my wife's brother, my sister's husband, etc.) that held true for both consanguineous and affinal kin.

*Pentheros* (πένθερος), meaning father-in-law, was not an innovation of the tenth or eleventh century, but the related term *sympentheros* (συμπένθερος, "co-father-in-law") seems to have been something new. *Gambros* (γαμβρός, "brother-" or "son-in-law"), like *pentheros*, is an extremely ancient Greek word; *syggambros* (σύγγαμβρος), however, denoting "co-brothers-in-law," was a new addition.[26] *Trigeneia* (τριγένεια), though rare outside of legal texts, is another innovation (or reintroduction) in the language of affinity in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. In Byzantine law, *trigeneia* referred to the relationship shared by three separate families (τρία γένη), usually through the marriages of two siblings. The term could be used for any situation in which two families have created affinity with a third, including cases in which an individual married for a second time.[27] The situation created by such unions of three families and the marriage impediments

**22** Wilgaux, "Les évolutions du vocabulaire grec de la parenté," 217.

**23** Examples of this include the increased employment of *autadelphos*, as distinguished from *adelphos*, to indicate biological siblings, the appearance of *gynaik-* and *andradelphos* to indicate a brother-in-law, and the preference for *exadelphos* (rather than *anepsios*) to express "cousin."

**24** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 467–88, esp. 472.

**25** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*; Ruth Macrides, "Dynastic Marriages and Political Kinship," in *Byzantine Diplomacy*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992), 263–80.

**26** Though far from perfect evidence, a search using the online database of the *Thesaurus Lingaue Graecae* (performed 5/27/15) produced no instances earlier than the mid-tenth-century *Souda* (https://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/index.prev.php).

**27** Konstantinos Pitsakes (Constantin Pitsakis), "Parenté en dehors de la parenté: Formes de parenté d'origine extra-législative en droit byzantin et post-byzantin," *Parenté et société dans le monde grec de l'Antiquité à l'âge moderne. Colloque international, Volos (Grèce), 19–20–21 Juin*

resulting from them were an issue for debate taken up by the circle of jurists around Eustathios Romaios in the mid-eleventh century.[28] Both *trigeneia* and *syggambros* became particularly important under the Komnenoi (especially under Manuel I), when they were incorporated into the system of precedence and title at the imperial court.[29]

A greater interest in kinship and a larger number of distinctions are clearly visible in Byzantine sources after the tenth century. Though generally few in number, many of the true neologisms that appear in the tenth through twelfth centuries (*sympentheros*, *syggambros*, and *trigeneia*) suggest a greater emphasis on collaboration between two or more separate families (*genē*). The very fact of needing (or choosing) to utilize a separate word to indicate the shared interests between two or more *genē* suggests not only a great level of cooperation, or expected cooperation, among *genē* tied through marriage, it also argues for a high degree of cooperation and shared interests within each respective *genos*. In fact, the same period also witnessed an increased frequency with which marriage itself was termed, literally, an "alliance."[30] Additionally, a kind of vocabulary for discussing and describing the (extended) family as a unit, i.e. the *genos*, achieved some degree of codification precisely at this time. Subtle linguistic changes like these further argue for the growing significance of the *genos* and the assumption of shared interests and cohesion within it.

## Synonyms of the *Genos* and Other Forms of "Family"

Even if the *genos* gradually earned a central position in the sources, a surprising variety of terms continued to be used as (near-)synonyms throughout the medieval period. *Genea* (γενεὰ) appears most commonly as a synonym of the *genos*, though *oikos* (household) and *syggeneia* (kinship), slightly different in meaning and connotations, are employed even more often. The variety of terms used by Byzantine authors to denote the *genos* includes a significant number of apparent borrowings from classical Greek (especially Athenian) concepts, in which *genos* is included. Other such words include *phylon* (φῦλον), *phratra/-ia* (φράτρα/φρατρία), and even *demos* (δῆμος).[31]

The most common designator for "the family" in Byzantine sources is undoubtedly the *oikos*, or "household." While the difference is not clear in every case, most often the Byzantine sources make a distinction between the *genos* and its synonyms on the one

*2003*, edited by Alain Bresson, Marie-Paule Masson, Stavros Perentidis, and Jérôme Wilgaux (Bordeaux: Diffusion de Boccard, 2006), 316.

**28** Pitsakes, "Parenté en dehors de la parenté: Formes de parenté d'origine extra-législative en droit byzantin et post-byzantin," 316.

**29** Lucien Stiernon, "Notes de titulature et de prosopographie byzantine. Sébaste et gambros," *REB* 23 (1965): 222–43.

**30** Patlagean, "Les débuts d'une aristocratie byzantine," 33.

**31** For an example of the unusual use of the term *dēmos* to denote a family, see Stephanos Efthymiadis and Jeffrey Featherstone, "Establishing a Holy Lineage: Theodore the Stoudite's Funerary Catechism for His Mother (BHG 2422)," in *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter*, ed. Michael Grünbart (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 45 (§6).

hand and the *oikos*/household on the other. The *oikos* typically consisted of the nuclear family and any number of servants, slaves, and other hangers-on (often referred to simply as one's "men," ἄνθρωποι), and it served as the basic social and economic unit in Byzantium.[32] Perhaps the clearest difference between *oikos* and *genos* is that the former would include members of the household not bound to the head of the household through biological kinship (i.e. slaves, servants, "men," and other hangers-on). This, however, assumes a level of differentiation and specificity not always evident in the sources.

*Syggeneia* (συγγένεια), usually rendered in English as "kinship" itself, is equally common. As the English translation suggests, however, the term is rarely used to designate a family or kin group per se, meaning it cannot generally be considered a synonym of the *genos* or related concepts.

Prior to the middle of the eleventh century, *genea* (γενεά) seems to have been the preferred word whose meaning and range of uses more or less matches the later use of *genos*.[33] Like *genos*, *genea* could designate a kin group or some larger association of persons or things linked through powerful bonds, often biological. Also like *genos*, *genea* could be used to indicate ties of blood (κατὰ γενεάν), as opposed to other forms of kinship. In the mid-tenth century, for example, Symeon the Logothetes uses *genea* when he describes how Emperor Michael III's mother apparently warned him that the future Emperor Basil I would be the one "who will destroy our family/dynasty (γενεὰν ἡμῶν)."[34] Unlike *genos*, *genea* appears as an indication of generation, in addition to its use as a term for the family. Also unlike the *genos*, *genea* was rarely used to refer to nations or ethnic groups.

Kekaumenos's eleventh-century *Advice and Anecdotes* contains several instances of the borrowed Latin form *phamilia* (φαμιλία).[35] Kekaumenos is not alone among Byzantine authors in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in his use of the term *phamilia*, borrowed from Latin, though he is no clearer than his contemporaries in its precise

**32** Magdalino, "The Byzantine Aristocratic Oikos," 92–105. According to the Byzantine legal tradition, at the age of 25 a (male) individual was considered an independent, tax-paying adult and the head of his own household, though many children will have married and, perhaps, moved out of their parents' care long before then. The legal age for marriage throughout the eleventh century was fourteen for males, twelve for females. Betrothal was legal at age seven. Judging by the amount of attention underage betrothals and marriages receives in the extant sources, particularly from the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, it would seem to have been quite common among the aristocracy to attempt to arrange marriages for their children even younger.

**33** For example, in the formula *kata genean* (κατὰ γενεάν), indicating a relationship "by blood." See, for example, Michael Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, Ep. 35, ed. and trans. Paul Gautier (Paris: Institut Français d'Études Byzantines, 1972).

**34** Symeon (Magister) Logothetes, *History*, 131.16, ed. S. Wahlgren, *Symeonis magistri et logothetae chronicon*, Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae (CFHB) 44/1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006): οὗτός ἐστι, τέκνον μου, ὁ μέλλων τὴν γενεὰν ἡμῶν ἀφανίσαι.

**35** Kekaumenos, *Advice and Anecdotes*, 168, 175, and 188, ed. M. D. Spadaro, *Raccomandazioni e consigli di un galantuomo* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1998). Hereafter cited simply as Kekaumenos.

meaning.[36] One modern lexicon equates the Greek form *phamilia* with the indigenous term *genea*,[37] while another defines it simply as "household."[38] In *Advice and Anecdotes*, it is at least clear that *phamilia* refers solely to a group of living individuals and does not include a sense of a longer lineage, as both *genos* and *genea* often do. In general, it seems that, for Kekaumenos, *phamilia* signifies the nuclear family, perhaps somewhat interchangeable with *oikos*. Some passages suggest that the term simply encompassed one's wife and children, but how hard and fast this limit holds remains unclear.[39]

*Phylon* (φῦλον), like *genos*, could also designate ethnic groups/nations and sex/gender in the medieval period, in addition to being used as a rough synonym for the *genos* as kin group.[40] It seems to have been more common for authors to use the term as an indicator of tribal affiliation, sometimes appearing as a sub-division of a *genos* as ethnic group. Anthony Kaldellis has suggested the *phylon* in some way "suggested 'race,' " which may be a slight exaggeration.[41] The distinction between kin group and ethnic group is not always clear in the term *phylon*. Such use can be found in the *Vita Basilii*, book five of the continuation of Theophanes's chronicle. Written in the mid-tenth century, it uses both *phatria* (φρατρία) and *phylē* (φυλή) to speak of the group of princes who supposedly remained separate over several generations in Macedonia, blurring the lines between ethnic group and family groups or lineage.[42]

*Phylon* makes a particularly noteworthy appearance in the late tenth-century history of Leo the Deacon. When Leo records what he claims to be the actual text of a letter written by the rebel Bardas Phokas to newly crowned Emperor John I Tzimiskes in 971, *phylon* appears as a synonym of *genos*.[43] Significantly, this is the only time this ancient

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**36** It remains unclear whether the word's presence in the medieval Greek language represents a survival from an earlier era or a loan resulting from more recent contact with western Europeans.

**37** Evangelinus A. Sophocles, *Greek Lexicon of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 1134.

**38** G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 1470.

**39** Kekaumenos, 188.1–6: εἰ δὲ καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ τέκνα αὐτῶν εἰσάγωσιν εἴς τι κάστρον τῆς Ῥωμανίας, πρότρεψον εἰσαγαγεῖναὐτάς, πλὴν ἔνδον τοῦ κουλὰ ἔστωσαν· αὐτοὶ ἔξω ἔστωσαν. καὶ εἴπερ θέλουσιν εἰσέρχεσθαι εἰς τὰς φαμιλίας αὐτῶν, δύο ἢ τρεῖς εἰσερχέσθωσαν· ὀπόταν δὲ αὐτοὶ ἐξέλθωσιν, ἄλλοι πάλιν εἰσερχέσθωσάν σοι.

**40** For example, in George Tornikes's encomium for Anna Komnene, in Jean Darrouzès, ed. and trans., *Georges et Dèmètrios Tornikès: Lettres et discours* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1970), 229.21–22: Τὸ γὰρ γυναῖκα, τὴν φύσιν τοῦ ἀπαλοῦ τούτου φύλου …

**41** Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 87. Most scholars who study the concept of race consider it to be the product of the early modern world. While *phylon* (and *genos*), as understood by medieval Byzantines, might denote some aspects associated with the modern concept of race, it is problematic to evoke the term directly in a Byzantine context.

**42** *Theophanes Continuatus*, 5.213–16, ed. Immanuel Bekker, Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae 33 (Bonn: Weber, 1838); Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie à Byzance," 272.

**43** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 116.15, ed. C. B. Hase (Berlin: Weber, 1828): τοῦ ὁμογνίου αἵματος ἐπτ απλασίως ἑκτίσοντα τὸ ἀνταπόδομα, τῷ πανολεθρίᾳ τὸ γενναῖον καὶ ἠρωϊκὸν φῦλον παραπέμψαι σκαιωρήσαντι. Leo has Bardas refer to his own "brave and heroic *phylon*."

Greek word appears in the entire text. This unusual addition may suggest one of two alternatives; either Leo was quoting directly from a letter or other pamphlet which had been written by Bardas Phokas or a supporter of his cause, or, perhaps more likely, Leo is here using a slight change in his vocabulary as a way of strengthening his rhetorical *ethopoeia*, creating, as it were, the illusion of speaking with another man's voice.

## *Genos*: Frequency of Appearance Over Time

One of the most significant changes in the vocabulary of kinship in the medieval period involved the employment of the term *genos* itself. Several scholars have noted the increasing use of the term after the tenth century.[44] Patlagean has also indicated that, already in the tenth-century chronicle known as *Theophanes Continuatus*, older traditions of nicknaming and personal epithets continued alongside a noticeable increase in mentions of family (*genos*) affiliations and a greater interest in lineage (represented by the words *genos*, *genea*, and/or *seira*).[45] Patlagean's claim that the word *genos* "returned" is perhaps a slight exaggeration (it never really disappeared from the Greek vocabulary), but there is no doubt that it quickly achieved a status within the Byzantine vocabulary that it had not previously enjoyed. Thanks to the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* online database, such statements can be put to the test quantitatively.[46]

The tables below display the comparative frequency with which the term *genos* appears in a selection of texts from the period covered by this book. Table 1 lists each text with the number of occurrences of the term *genos* per 10,000 words, while Figure 1 offers a visualization of the same material in a bar graph. In an effort to yield as few variables as possible, the texts included have been limited to chronicles and histories produced between the ninth and early thirteenth centuries. The list of texts, thirteen in all, is not exhaustive. Rather, it is meant to offer a small sample suggestive of larger trends. This is, of course, an imperfect model, as chroniclers in the ninth century had very different aims and employed very different methods than did historians of the twelfth or thirteenth century. Still, such texts tend to be lengthy, producing a high volume of words through which to sift, and to have certain features that are broadly consistent.

Such findings cannot offer anything more than a general impression of linguistic change, given the large number of synonyms used by the sources to indicate the family (e.g. *genea*, *phylon*, *phamilia*, even *oikos*) and the multiple uses to which the term *genos* itself was put. Still, the impression given by this evidence supports the contention that the *genos*, both as a concept and as a social unit, gradually moved to the forefront of Byzantine consciousness over the course of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, with a significant increase visible between the beginning of the eleventh century and its end. In fact, when one begins to analyse the individual uses of the term within

**44** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 472.

**45** Patlagean, "Les débuts d'une aristocratie byzantine," 30.

**46** *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu.

**Table 1. Frequency of Appearance of *Genos* in Historical Narratives.**

| Text | Appearances of *genos*/10,000 words |
|---|---|
| Theophanes, *Chronographia* (early ninth cent.) | 2.7 |
| George the Monk, *Chronographia* (early ninth cent.) | 4 |
| *Theophanes Continuatus* (mid-tenth cent.) | 3.1 |
| Symeon Logothetes, *Chronographia* (mid-tenth cent.) | 3.5 |
| Leo the Deacon, *History* (ca. 1000) | 3.8 |
| Michael Psellos, *Chronographia* (1070s or early 1080s) | 14.3 |
| John Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories* (late eleventh cent.) | 6.1 |
| *Skylitzes Continuatus* (late eleventh cent.) | 5.9 |
| Michael Attaleiates, *History* (late eleventh cent.) | 8.6 |
| Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History* (twelfth cent.) | 7.6 |
| Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* (mid-twelfth cent.) | 4.5 |
| John Kinnamos, *Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos* (late twelfth cent.) | 6.3 |
| Niketas Choniates, *History* (early thirteenth cent.) | 11.2 |

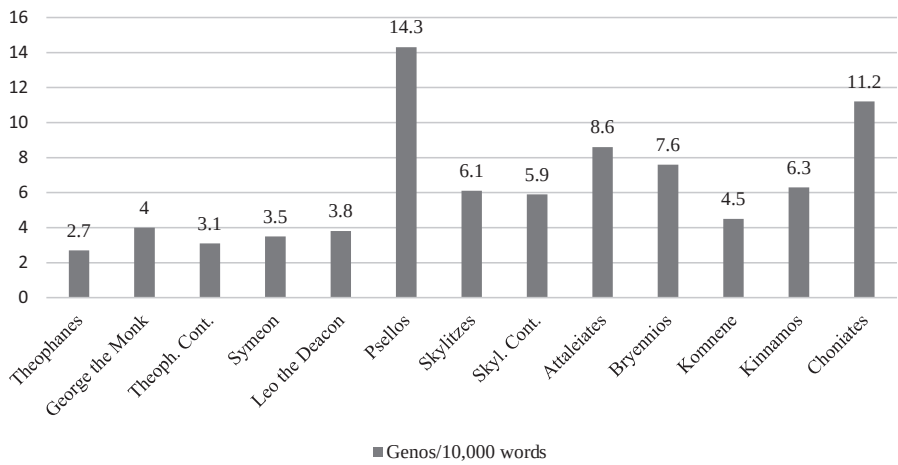


**Figure 1. Frequency of Appearance of *Genos* in Historical Narratives.**

each of the texts cited here, the differences between eighth- or ninth-century chronicles and histories written in the late eleventh or twelfth centuries become even more marked.

When not used to refer to family groups, *genos* appears most often in passages relating to various ethnic groups, especially Jewish tribes. This is true, for example, in the chronicles of Theophanes and George the Monk, where there are more appearances of the term in this sense than in any other.[47] In these texts, *genos* is rarely employed to indicate a family or kin group. In Niketas Choniates's *History*, on the other hand, nearly every appearance of the term is as an indicator of kinship or ancestry.

The unusually high number of appearances of the term in Michael Psellos's *Chronographia* is partially due to the author's personal style, favouring the use of the word not only to indicate aristocratic lineages, but also to denote things like political factions. He famously uses the phrase *politikon genos* to refer to the civil bureaucracy and/or guilds of Constantinople, which he then contrasted with those individuals and families who made up the "senatorial" class.[48] Elsewhere, in one of his letters, Psellos again contrasts the *politikon genos* with the Scythians as nomads.[49] Psellos, like many others, blurs the line between *genos* as kin group and *genos* as a kind of ethnic or national group or even as a social order with no genealogical links whatsoever.

The timeline suggested by these data corresponds with the appearance of family names in the same or similar sources, which is not surprising.[50] The growing frequency in the appearance of surnames from the late tenth and eleventh centuries and the increasing amount of detail given regarding an individual's relation to a particular *genos* (including the use of the term *genos* itself) on lead seals reflects contemporary practices found in other written sources, indicative of the development of the aristocratic *genos* into the form of "the family" of most social and cultural relevance. Histories and chronicles written in the mid-tenth and early eleventh centuries (e.g. *Theophanes Continuatus* and Leo the Deacon) only give surnames for a fraction of the persons introduced into the narrative. Theophanes in his chronicle names ninety-seven persons "without a second name, and only 22 individuals … with an additional name (surname)." By comparison, in Niketas Choniates's *History*, written almost four centuries later, "only 23 names are not followed by the surname … 105 people are specified in Choniates by double names, and their surnames are not individual sobriquets but solidly established names of

**47** Both chroniclers cover the history of the world beginning with creation. Thus, large sections of both utilize biblical sources and borrow from the vocabulary of the Greek Septuagint, which explains several of their uses of the term *genos*.

**48** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 2.146; Magdalino, "Justice and Finance in the Byzantine State," 95.

**49** Konstantinos Sathas, ed., *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη ἢ Συλλογὴ ἀνεκδότων μνημείων τῆς ἑλληνικὴς ἱστορίας* (Venice: Τύποις του φοινικός, 1876), vol. 5, 515 (no. 208): Σκύθαι μὲν γὰρ Νομάδες τοῦ πολιτικοῦ γένους ἀπηλλοτρίωνται, καὶ τοῖς ἠπειρώταις οἱ νησιῶται οὐ πάνυ προσήκουσιν, αἵ τε διάφοροι τῶν κλιμάτων οἰκήσεις, ἀλλοτρίας τῶν οἰκητόρων τὰς γνώμας ἀποδιδόασιν.

**50** See the previous chapter for more details.

lineages …"[51] The kind of aristocratic kin group represented by the *genos* or its synonyms makes infrequent appearances in earlier works, and, even then, the vocabulary for this kind of kin group is inconsistent, suggesting that the authors are perhaps unsure of how to describe them or the relative novelty of this specific kind of family organization.

Narratives of the mid- to late eleventh and twelfth century (e.g. Michael Attaleiates, Anna Komnene, Nikephoros Bryennios) appear much more concerned with each of their actors' family background, often giving the reader not only a surname, but also a brief commentary on various qualities associated with that family or notable ancestors. By the close of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century (e.g. John Kinnamos and Niketas Choniates), scarcely a single actor appears without a surname, and descriptions of an individual's family and relation with notable ancestors and contemporaries can be quite lengthy indeed. Not only has the vocabulary of the *genos* become solidified by this point, but an entire repertoire of stock phrases and tropes used to describe these aristocratic *genē* has clearly taken shape, drawing especially from older language for ethnicity and royal/imperial dynasties. Inscriptions on lead seals, especially those from the twelfth century, display some of the same tendencies in their language. This includes not only the increasing frequency of the appearance of the term *genos* and/or reference to a family name, but also the predilection to differentiate between kinship on the mother's or father's side, as well as the frequent use of elaborate modifiers and evocative imagery to describe such families or relatives.[52]

Other sources produced in Byzantium between the tenth and the early thirteenth century display a similar trend. There is a marked, progressive increase in the frequency with which the *genos* appears, in part because the concept came ever more frequently to replace certain other formulations (e.g. "relative by blood" vs. "relative by *genos*"). The evidence clearly supports the contention that, over the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the *genos* moved to the centre of the Byzantine concept of kinship and its role in social and political life.

## Codification of the Vocabulary of the *Genos*

Just as it is possible to trace in the sources the eventual "victory" of the *genos* as the term adopted by aristocratic families as the designator of their lineage and larger kin group, so too do the sources display an ever-growing confidence, or at least a greater degree of uniformity, in the ways in which they describe a prominent (or obscure) *genos* and in how they ascribe an individual's membership in said *genos*. Put another way, concurrent with the progressive increase in the utilization of the *genos* as the form of kin group most

**51** Alexander Kazhdan, "The Formation of Byzantine Family Names in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," *Byzantinoslavica* 58 (1997): 94.

**52** For some representative samples of such language as it appears on surviving lead seals, see Vitalien Laurent, *Les bulles métriques dans la sigillographie byzantine* (Athens: Estia, 1932); Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 46–51 (Appendix 2.7); Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*, 2 vols. (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011–15).

central to the aristocracy, the ways in which authors discussed and described a *genos* developed into a kind of coded vocabulary.

Much of the language of praise or criticism of an individual's *genos* was intimately related to the concept of fame.[53] A praiseworthy *genos* was one that was well known, famous, or noteworthy. Obscurity, on the other hand, was tantamount to a lack of *genos* (ἀγενής). An individual from a reasonably wealthy and/or socially prominent family might be (somewhat coyly) described as from a *genos* or from among those who are "not unknown" (τῶν οὐκ ἀσήμων), while those families wishing especially to celebrate their prestige might be known as "noble among nobles" (εὐγενὴς τῶν εὐγενῶν).[54] Cheynet has highlighted the fact that certain formulas, such as οἱ ἐπίσημοι καὶ εὐγενεῖς ("the famous and noble") or οἱ λαμπροὶ τὸ γένος (those who "are illustrious in [their] *genos*") were reserved for those families who could count two or more generations of illustrious members by the last quarter of the eleventh century.[55]

Although hardly a revolutionary development, the use of plant-imagery and horticultural language reached new heights and sometimes impressive creativity as the *genos* moved squarely into the aristocratic vocabulary. Individuals were frequently described as the "offshoot" or "sapling" (βλάστημα, ὄρπηξ, κλάδος) of their *genos*, while the *genos* itself, with its strong associations with genealogical origins and the past, was often paired with terms like "root" (ῥίζη).[56] Indeed, in the kinds of (partial) genealogies that became especially common and much more politically and socially influential by the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, terms such as *rizouchia* (ῥιζουχία, "having roots") and *genarchia* (γεναρχία, combining *genos* with "beginning" or "origin") were also sometimes used to refer to one's lineage, showcasing the importance of origins and the backward-looking tendency inherent in the concept of lineage and, consequently, the *genos*.[57]

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**53** This fact has important implications for the role of the *genos* in general. See Chapter 5 for a more complete discussion.

**54** For the former, see (for example), the eleventh-century version of the *Miracles of St. Eugenios of Trebizond*, in *The Hagiographic Dossier of St. Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous Dionysiou 154*, ed. and trans. J. O. Rosenqvist (Uppsala: University of Uppsala, 1996), e.g. line 328: Γυνή τις τῶν οὐκ ἀσήμων. For the latter, several good examples are found in Niketas Stethatos's *The Life of St. Symeon the New Theologian*.

**55** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 256. "C'est que la notion de génos est liée à celle de gloire, qui s'acquiert avec la seule durée. Les formules οἱ ἐπίσημοι καὶ εὐγενεῖς, οἱ λαμπροὶ τὸ γένος désignent des familles comptant plusieurs générations d'hommes illustres."

**56** In George Tornikes's oration dedicated to Anna Komnene, her parents are described as "saplings of the root of the Komnenoi and Doukai, respectively." (Ἥρκει μὲν οὖν περὶ τῶν τῆς βασιλίδος ταυτησὶ γεννητόρων τοῦτο καὶ μόνον εἰπεῖν ὅτι Ἀλέξιος καὶ Εἰρήνη ταύτῃ γεννήτορες, ὁ μὲν Κομνηνῶν, ἡ δὲ Δουκῶν ῥίζης ὄρπηκες). See Darrouzès, *Georges et Dèmètrios Tornikès: Lettres et discours*, 235, lines 13–15. According to Darrouzès (220n1), the oration was probably written sometime around 1154–55, but he does not think that the oration was ever delivered in front of an audience.

**57** Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie à Byzance."

Even inscriptions found on lead seals begin, from early in the twelfth century, to display similar flowery language (often in meter) in reference to the owner's *genos*.[58] Such inscriptions often became so large that they precluded the owner of the seal from including any sort of iconography on one or both sides of the seal, a testament to the cultural value placed on such familial praise.

Perhaps the most notable, and most discussed, component of the language associated with the aristocratic *genos* in this period is the rise to prominence of a sense of nobility by birth (expressed as *eugeneia* or, in its adjectival form, *eugenēs*). The idea gained in importance and in the frequency with which it appears in the sources, particularly after the mid-eleventh century, and it was closely linked with the emergence of the *genos* as a particularly powerful identity-marker among the Byzantine aristocracy. It thus also represents an important aspect of the codification of the vocabulary used to discuss, praise, or criticize an individual's *genos*. At the same time, however, there persisted the idea that nobility could come not only from one's *genos*, but also through individual actions.[59] One could have a noble soul, an attribute completely separate from a noble bloodline.

The opposite of *eugeneia*, was typically expressed as either *dysgeneia* or *ageneia* (more commonly as adjectives, *dysgenēs* and *agenēs*).[60] While there were subtle differences between the two (having a disreputable *genos* vs. being without one), the two seem largely to have been interchangeable. Both were intimately connected with the social politics of reputation. No one could really have been without a *genos*, yet belonging to one that had not made a name for itself, and was thus unknown, was tantamount to being without a *genos* in some elite circles of the eleventh century and beyond.

The adjective *agenēs* and its variants were so derogatory in nature that Niketas Choniates could use it to describe how the "Scythians" had, in the reign of Isaac II Angelos, "sordidly (ἀγεννῶς) slinked out of their pens like wild animals."[61] In fact, terms connoting a "low-born" status can be found in many sources describing various "barbarian" peoples, even in the same period (and sometimes in the same sources) that such vocabulary was directed at individuals or families within the confines of the Byzantine Empire. Some barbarians were understood to be more "noble" than others. This is famously the case in the mid-tenth-century *De administrando imperio*, in which only the Franks were noble enough to warrant the honour of a Byzantine imperial bride.[62] One

**58** This phenomenon is well known among scholars and has been the subject of considerable discussion. See, for example, Laurent, *Les bulles métriques*; Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*.

**59** Kekaumenos, 11–12, 98–99; Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 220.

**60** For a good example of the use of *dysgenēs* in the tenth century, see John Wortley, trans., *The Spiritually Beneficial Tales of Paul, Bishop of Monembasia* (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1996), esp. 98.33–7; see also Judith Herrin, *Unrivalled Influence: Women and Empire in Byzantium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 273.

**61** Niketas Choniates, *Orations*, no. 4, lines 11–12, ed. Jan A. van Dieten, *Nicetae Choniatae Orationes et Epistulae* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972). This phrase uses language reminiscent of Psalm 103:22.

**62** Macrides, "Dynastic Marriages and Political Kinship," 266–67.

late eleventh-century text describes the Pechenegs not only as more numerous than the Uzes, but also as "nobler," though both groups are categorized as a "Scythian *genos*" (a reference to their semi-nomadic lifestyles, no doubt).[63]

Sources of many genres make clear that as the *genos* moved to the centre of the Byzantine vocabulary of kinship in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there grew up around it a coded vocabulary of belonging, nobility, and praise (and their opposites) more or less understood by all those at the upper end of the social spectrum, and perhaps many more. Taken together, the sources suggest not only the gradual development of the very idea of one's *genos* and the language and concepts attached thereto, it also reinforces the linguistic, and perhaps conceptual, affiliation between these aristocratic family groups and concepts of ethnicity or ethnic groups.

## *Genos* as *Ethnos*, *Genos* as Family

Certain similarities between ethnicity and kinship have long been recognized by scholars.[64] Both might be understood as cultural constructs viewed as inherently biological or natural in their reproduction. Both were fundamental to individual and group identities, which manifested themselves in many spheres of society and had a profound impact on behaviour and representation in literature or art. In Byzantine Greek, both could also find expression in the term *genos*. Not only could both groups be identified with the term *genos* (or its synonyms), the language typically accompanying either concept is remarkably similar in medieval Byzantine sources as well. If one recalls the definition of the *genos* offered in Nikephoros Blemmydes's philosophy, in which the difference between the *genos* as ethnic group and *genos* as kin group is really just one of scale, the conceptual overlap between the two ideas becomes difficult to ignore.

Byzantine concepts of ethnicity and identity are notoriously difficult to pin down. Byzantine identity has garnered a large amount of attention in recent years, both for its complicated nature and, to a certain extent, to rehabilitate the notion that their self-identification as Romans cannot simply be written off.[65] To follow the definition set down by Gill Page in his study of medieval Byzantine identity, ethnicity is to be found at the "nexus of three fundamental areas": the individual, subjective belief of memberships in a group based on ancestry and bolstered by the certainty that others in the group

**63** *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 114, ed. Eudoxios Th. Tsolakis, *Η Συνέχεια τῆς Χρονογραφίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτση* (Thessaloniki: Etaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1968): τὸ τῶν Οὔζων ἔθνος, γένος δὲ καὶ οὗτοι σκυθικὸν καὶ τῶν Πατζινάκων εὐγενέστερον καὶ πολυπληθέστερον, παγγενεὶ μετὰ τῆς ἰδίας ἀποσκευῆς τὸν Ἴστρον περαιωθὲν.

**64** Walter Pohl, "Gender and Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300–900*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 23–43.

**65** An excellent treatment can be found in Ioannis Stouraitis, "Roman Identity in Byzantium: A Critical Approach," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 107 (2014): 175–220; see also Anthony Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic: People and Power in New Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

will recognize him/her as such, the "possession, expression or favouring [of] certain social and cultural traits (the 'ethnic criteria') by members of the group," and an awareness of the boundaries between "us" and "them."[66] According to this argument, both the Byzantine notion of *ethnos* and, in most cases, *genos* fulfil the necessary criteria.

Regardless of whether the *genos* of the Romans constituted an ethnic identity, the concept was a powerful marker of collective identity and group cohesion in both of the (interrelated) ideas of the *genos* of the Romans and the *genos* of the Christians, the two most common and, arguably, most powerful means used by medieval Byzantines to conceptualize their community on a large scale.[67] The *genos*, in fact, became the favoured concept of self-identification for the Greek-speaking, Orthodox Christian community within the Ottoman Empire.[68] For those within the community, they were simply members of "the *genos*." This usage developed out of the Byzantine identification with the *genos* of the Romans and is reflected already in some texts from as early as the ninth century. It makes several appearances in the homilies of ninth-century polymath and Patriarch of Constantinople Photios. In his first homily on the attack of the Rus' on Constantinople sometime in the early 860s, for example, the "barbarians" are described as seeking "to destroy the entire *genos*."[69] In another, dedicated to Emperor Michael III and the future Emperor Basil I, Photios draws upon the common formula of the salvation of the *genos*, in this case describing how the Logos "took flesh from the virgin [Mary] for the common salvation of the *genos*."[70]

The position of the emperor was often imagined as the leader, even father, of the *genos* of the Romans. Michael Psellos praises Constantine IX Monomachos, using a pun based on his surname, as "one who would face danger in advance and alone for the state (κράτος) … fighting in single combat for the common fame of our people (ὑπὲρ τῆς κοινῆς τοῦ γένους εὐκλείας)."[71] It is worth noting not only the fact that the emperor is imagined as fighting on behalf of the *genos*, but that he is apparently doing so for its "common fame." The language of reputation associated with the *genos* is very much reminiscent of that associated with the *genos* as aristocratic kin group. Michael Attaleiates criticizes Michael VII Doukas for not doing everything he could for the "salvation of the entire

**66** Page, *Being Byzantine*, 11–13.

**67** For two opposing views on this debate, see Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, 88; Page, *Being Byzantine*, 41–43.

**68** Sia Anagnostopoulou, "The Terms *millet*, *genos*, *ethnos*, *oikoumenikotita*, *alytrotismos* in Greek Historiography," in *The Passage from the Ottoman Empire to Nation-States: A Long and Difficult Process: The Greek Case*, ed. Sia Anagnostopoulou (Istanbul: Isis Press, 2004), 37–55.

**69** Photios, *Homilies*, no. 3, lines 9–10, ed. B. Laourdas, ΦΩΤΙΟΥ ΟΜΙΛΙΑΙ, *Ἑλληνικά* Παράρτημα 12 (Thessaloniki: Etaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1966): 29: ἀλλ' ἀνθρώπων αὐτῶν οἰκτρῶς τὰ σώματα συναλήθουσα καὶ τὸ γένος ἅπαν πικρῶς ὀλοθρεύουσα …

**70** Photios, *Homilies*, no. 18, lines 16–17, ed. Laourdas, 176: ὁ λόγος ἐκ παρθένου σάρκα λαβὼν εἰς κοινὴν τοῦ γένους σωτηρίαν.

**71** Michael Psellos, "Encomium for Constantine Leichoudes," 398–99, quoted and translated in Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, 58.

Roman *genos*" (σωτηρίαν τοῦ γένους παντὸς τῶν Ῥωμαίων), which served to discredit the emperor whom Attaleiates's patron, Nikephoros III Botaneiates, sought to replace.[72]

In *The Muses*, a unique twelfth-century document similar to a mirror of princes, the role of emperor is described as "the leader of the army and the *genos*."[73] The dual focus is intended to convey the seriousness of the responsibility associated with the office. After the reorganization of the imperial administration under Alexios I, and considering the prevailing social mores of the time, the precise meaning of the term *genos* in this instance could be, and perhaps was, interpreted as having a dual meaning. While it obviously recalls the *genos* of the Romans, the Komnenian government was at the same time held together by familial ties with the *genos* of the Komnenoi.[74] Alexios's heir would, in fact, be not only the "ruler of the *genos* of the Romans," he would also find himself at the head of the *genos* of the Komnenoi, a charge no less vital in twelfth-century Byzantium.

Similarly, in formulations of the *genos* of the Romans or of Christians, the ancient term *archēgos* (ἀρχηγός) makes frequent appearances. A common appellation of Christ in Byzantine texts, the term carried with it associations with both founder and leader or prince.[75] So, in the late twelfth-century orations of Niketas Choniates, Christ is repeatedly described as "the *archēgos* of our *genos* and of [our] salvation."[76] *Archēgos* also appears in contexts describing founders of individual families. In a funerary oration (ἐπιτάφιος λόγος) to Theodore Trochos, Choniates utilizes the concept in both functions using parallel structures. Early in the oration, Choniates praises Theodore for having contributed to his family's reputation and nobility, despite having come from rather humble beginnings. "You did not have illustrious and famous examples of the founders of [your] *genos* (τῶν ἀρχηγῶν τοῦ γένους), rather you yourself have ennobled these [men]."[77]

While one cannot assume a perfect, one-to-one correlation between the significance of belonging to the *genos* of the Romans and to the *genos* of the Phokades or Komnenoi, there is enough evidence linking the two concepts to suggest a certain degree of conceptual overlap. Expectations of solidarity within and loyalty to one's *genos*, along with its central place in social and political identity, is shared across the term's various uses. In the chronicle of *Theophanes Continuatus*, a certain Constantine is said to have been especially friendly toward Basil I "since he himself drew his *genos* from the Armenians."[78] In Attaleiates's history, a certain Nestor is supposed to have joined forces with an enemy of

**72** Attaleiates, *History*, 26.6, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 338–41.

**73** Paul Maas, ed., "Die Musen des Kaisers Alexios I," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 22 (1913): 350, line 62: ἄρχων δὲ παντὸς τοῦ στρατοῦ καὶ τοῦ γένους …

**74** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 184–217.

**75** H. G. Liddell and P. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 252.

**76** Niketas Choniates, *Orations*, no. 3, line 25: ὦ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν καὶ τῆς σωτηρίας ἀρχηγέ.

**77** Choniates, *Orations*, no. 3, line 17: Οὐκοῦν καὶ μὴ ἔχων πάνυ λαμπρά τε καὶ περιώνυμα τῶν ἀρχηγῶν τοῦ γένους τὰ παραδείγματα, τούτους αὐτὸς ἐσέμνωσας …

**78** *Theophanes Continuatus* 5.230.1–3: ὁ προμνημονευθεὶς Κωνσταντῖνος πατρίκιος, σφόδρα φιλίως πρὸς τὸν Βασίλειον διακείμενος ἅτε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐξ Ἀρμενίων ἔλκων τὸ γένος … Basil I was widely regarded as having Armenian ancestry.

the empire "due to the equivalence of their races" (τῷ ὁμοτίμῳ τοῦ γένους).[79] In general, the *genos* served as the clearest, and perhaps strongest marker of the "in-group," even when the concept functioned at different scales.

Byzantine authors are not prone to extended ruminations on the implications of *genos* membership as it concerns kin groups in the tenth through twelfth centuries. There is, however, a longer tradition of such discussions concerning the Roman people and the ideals associated with inclusion in this privileged group. This, then, allows for more thorough analysis by modern scholars, which has significance not only for a more thorough understanding of Byzantine identity writ large, but also for the *genos* as kin group. In short, an examination of one can reveal certain, fundamental aspects of the other. The potential utility of this approach and the extent of the conceptual overlap among the various uses of the concept of the *genos* are perhaps clearest in the importance placed on the "continuation" or "preservation" of the *genos*.

## Continuation or Preservation of the *Genos*

Whether speaking of the *genos* as a family, a nation, or the entire human race, the continuation, preservation, and/or succession of the *genos* was always a primary concern. This singular concept, expressed in a number of ways, was most prominently displayed encompassing two primary means of preservation: fighting in defence of the *genos* and biological reproduction.

A common theme in Byzantine literature concerning marriage predictably emphasizes the importance of the institution for the "continuation of the *genos*" through procreation.[80] This continued well into the period concerned here and beyond, even if John Chrysostom had argued in the fourth century that the world was already full of people and, thus, child rearing was no longer the primary reason for marriage.[81] In the Galenic corpus of medical texts, the phrase appears frequently in contexts related to human reproduction, which is envisioned as the "continuation of the *genos*" (ἡ διαμονὴ τοῦ γένους).[82] The virtue extended to the imperial family as well. The prooemium of the *De administrando imperio* concludes with the following prayer: "May the trunk of his [Romanos II's] *genos* be darkened by the leaves of many offspring …"[83]

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**79** Attaleiates, *History*, 26.2, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 374–75.

**80** The Tome of Sisinnios, for example. See Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 11–19.

**81** See Migne, *PG*, vol. 51, 213.

**82** For example, it appears in Galen, *De usu partium libri XVII*, vol. 4, 144, line 13, inter alia, ed. Georg Helmreich, 2 vols. (vol. 3 and 4) (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907–1909). The same idea is sometimes expressed as the "protection" (φυλακή) or the "continuation" (διαδοχή) of the *genos* in Galen's works. See also Chapter 4.

**83** *De administrando imperio*, prooem., lines 46–48, ed. Gyula Moravcsik, trans. Romilly Jenkins (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1967): Κατασκιασθείη τὸ στέλεχος τοῦ γένους αὐτοῦ πολυγονίας φύλλοις …

The Komnenoi were famous even among their contemporaries for the large number of children within their *genos*, but the ideal of the continuation of the *genos* through reproduction was much older.[84] It is particularly visible in hagiography, in which saints are often shown having to choose between entering into an ascetic or monastic life dedicated to God or the perpetuation of the family line. The two choices typically appear as almost equally powerful in their draw. Such is the case, for example, in the *Catechism* for his mother, Theoktiste, written in the ninth century by the champion of icons and prolific author Theodore the Stoudite. Early in the text, which acts as an encomiastic biography of his mother, Theodore recounts her decision to dedicate not only herself, but her entire household to the ascetic worship of God. The most informative portion of the text comes in the list of reasons why a married couple would want to avoid dedicating their lives to God, leaving the social world of Byzantium behind.

> This event took the empress by surprise on the very day; it astonished the relations of the family; it left acquaintances perplexed … that a married couple still in middle age and self-sufficient in their livelihood, holding an imperial dignity in the treasury and having grown children was not bound by affection for these latter (τῷ τούτων φίλτρῳ), nor desire for the succession of their race (οὐ τῷ καταλιπεῖν διάδοχον τοῦ γένους), nor the bonds of kinship (οὐδὲ τῷ αἵματι τῆς ἀγχιστείας), nor the alienation of their household (τῆς οἰκίας), nor yet the loss of their servants …[85]

Similarly, in the ninth-century *Life of St. Euthymios the Younger*, the saint is said to have inspired a desire to enter the monastic life in his entire family, which most of them did. The exception was his daughter Anastaso, "who was urged to marry and bear children 'for the perpetuation of the family' (πρὸς διαμονὴν τοῦ γένους)."[86] Whether speaking of the *genos* as family or as something more grandiose, its continuation through reproduction was a universal ideal in Byzantine thought and was expressed in precisely the same formulation. But the *genos* was not preserved or continued solely through biological reproduction. It also had to be defended against outside threats.

A Byzantine office intended for the commemoration of war dead attests to the centrality of *genos* (and *patris*, or "fatherland") in the conceptualization of group loyalties and communal identity in Byzantium.[87] The office, which consists of a prayer of 367

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**84** Barbara Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium: Power, Patronage and Ideology* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999), 139–42; Shaun Tougher, "Imperial Families: The Case of the Macedonians (867–1056)," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 303–26.

**85** Efthymiadis and Featherstone, "Establishing a Holy Lineage: Theodore the Stoudite's Funerary Catechism for His Mother (BHG 2422)," 45 (6).

**86** Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," 120; *Life of Euthymios Patriarch of Constantinople*, 172–74, ed. and trans. Patricia Karlin-Hayter, *Vita Euthymii Patriarchae CP* (Brussels: Éditions de *Byzantion*, 1970).

**87** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 183–211. The manuscript, Cod. Sinaiticus Gr. 734, has been dated to the tenth century. There are two other such offices known to survive from

lines addressed primarily to Christ, was apparently an attempted innovation to the more usual prayers on behalf of the dead normally recited on the Saturday before Forgiveness Sunday (Σάββατον τῆς Ἀπόκρεω or Ψυχοσάββατον).[88] The office offers a glimpse into the worldview espoused by contemporary Byzantines in the context of war, illuminating the ways in which collective identity and motivations for war were imagined in the early tenth century.

Throughout the prayer, Christ's people are alternately referred to as *laos* (τοῦ λαοῦ σου)[89] or *ethnos* (τὸ ἔθνος σου),[90] or simply "your servants" (οἱ δοῦλοι σου).[91] The *genos* makes several appearances, and the language of kinship appears repeatedly at the forefront of the office. Those Byzantines who had died in combat or captivity are called "our brothers" (ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν) and "our *homophyloi*" (τοῖς ἡμῶν ὁμοφύλοις) that is, "those of the same *phylon*."[92] As for the soldiers, they have died "for you" (Christ) (ὑπὲρ σοῦ),[93] "for the Lord's patrimony" (ὑπὲρ κληρονομίας τεθνηκότες τῆς αὐτοῦ),[94] "for your people" (ὑπὲρ τοῦ λαοῦ σου),[95] "for the Christ-named [Christians]" (ὑπὲρ χριστω νύμων),[96] and "for the *genos* and the nation (φύλου) of Christians."[97] The last formula is worth repeating in whole: "Truly honourable is the death on behalf of the *genos* and of the Christian nation (φύλου), [which] they, whose memory we faithfully celebrate today, have suffered in captivity and war."[98] A roughly contemporary prayer for fallen soldiers echoes this language. "They have shown themselves the foundations of the fatherland and of the entire *genos* (πατρίδος καὶ τοῦ γένους παντὸς ἐδραιώματα)."[99]

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roughly the same period. They have both been edited and published. See Louis Petit, ed., "Office inédit en l'honeur de Nicéphore Phocas," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 13 (1904): 398–420 and Agostino Pertusi, ed., "Una acolouthia militare inedita del X secolo," *Aevum* 22 (1948): 145–68.

**88** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 183.

**89** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 188, line 30; 190, line 65; 192, line 110.

**90** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 192, line 105.

**91** *Laos* is by far the most common throughout the text. Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," passim.

**92** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 186, lines 10–11; 206, line 340: … τοῖς ἡμῶν ὁμοφύλοις τοῖς ἐν πολέμοις καὶ δεσμοῖς θανοῦσιν ὑπὲρ σοῦ …

**93** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 188, line 34; 190, lines 79 and 90; 202, line 255; 206, line 342.

**94** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 194, line 121.

**95** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 192, line 110;

**96** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 198, line 189.

**97** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 204, lines 315–16.

**98** Détorakis and Mossay, "Un office byzantin inédit," 204, lines 315–16: Τίμιος ὁ θάνατος ἀληθῶς τῶν ὑπὲρ τοῦ γένους καὶ τοῦ φύλου χριστιανῶν τετελευτηκότων ἐν δεσμοῖς καὶ πολέμοις, ὧν σήμερον τὴν μνήμην ἐπιτελοῦμεν πιστῶς.

**99** Translation by Frank R. Trombley, "War, Society, and Popular Religion in Byzantine Anatolia (6th–13th Centuries)," in *Η Βυζαντινή Μικρά Ασία (6ος–12ος αι.)*, ed. Nicolas Oikonomidès and Spyros Vryonis (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 1998), 98.

One might rightly ask for which *genos* a soldier or general viewed himself as fighting and potentially dying. The author of this office may have been speaking of the *genos* of the Romans or of all Christians, but for soldiers staring death in the face on the front lines, the motivations for doing so could be less esoteric, even if the ideals they espoused were expressed or imagined in the very same language. The *genos* in the office could easily be understood at the familial, rather than "national" scale. Indeed, several surviving military handbooks from the Byzantine era attest to the practice of grouping soldiers according to geographic origins, ethnicity, and even families (fathers and sons or siblings).[100] In the heat of battle, soldiers may very well have been fighting for their kinsmen or *homophyloi* at their sides rather than some lofty ideal of the *genos* of all Christians.

When, in 970–971, Bardas Phokas took up arms against John I Tzimiskes, his motivations (as recorded by Leo the Deacon) were clear. He sought to avenge the wrongful death of his uncle, Emperor Nikephoros II Phokas, and to defend his family's honour.[101] For Bardas, and probably many of his men as well, the *genos* was central to his reasons for fighting, but this *genos* was first and foremost of the Phokades. In the fictional *Digenes Akrites*, too, taken to represent the value system of twelfth-century Byzantine elites, the *genos* as kin group is clearly the most influential social group.[102] The *genos* of the Romans or of Christians is present, but it most often fades into the background.

The continuation and preservation of the *genos*, both through reproduction and defence against external enemies, was held as one of the highest ideals in medieval Byzantium. This held true for the *genos* as kin group as much as for the *genos* of the Romans. Yet the similarities between the two forms of *genos*, and the consequences of their shared vocabulary and ideals, extended beyond such lofty virtues. It can also be witnessed in the functions of "ethnic" and private monastic foundations.

## Monasteries and the *Genos*

Monastic communities were almost always consciously and overtly imagined as substitute families in Byzantium, even if monks or nuns failed to live up to the ideal of cutting all ties with their "earthly" families.[103] In the period considered here, it became especially common for Byzantine families, in particular amongst the aristocracy from the eleventh century onward, to found private monastic establishments on or near their estates.[104] These were designed to act as centres for the burial and commemoration of

**100** For example, "On Skirmishing," a tenth century military treatise dedicated to Nikephoros II Phokas. See George T. Dennis, ed. and trans., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1985), 137–66.

**101** For more on this episode, see above (page 44n43).

**102** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 193–96.

**103** Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," passim.

**104** John P. Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997).

deceased family members, and also contributed to each family's unique identity and cohesion.[105] So Eirene Doukaina's *typikon* of the monastery of Kecharitomene restricted the foundation's leadership, if not its entire membership, to female members of her immediate family and their descendants (i.e. her *genos*).[106] By the twelfth century, the foundation of monastic complexes had become a veritable competition among members of the elite as symbols of wealth and influence, especially in Constantinople and its environs.[107] Private religious foundations were a highly visible component of an aristocratic *genos*'s collective identity, serving both the spiritual and economic interests of its members.

Gregory Pakourianos, who came from an old Armeno-Georgian aristocratic family, had a successful career in the Byzantine military throughout the second half of the eleventh century.[108] After retiring from public life, he founded a monastery dedicated to the Mother of God at Petritzos, near Bačkovo, on some of the extensive lands he had been granted in the Balkans. The troops who had followed Gregory throughout his career seem to have been Georgian, and Gregory himself maintained a strong sense of his Georgian identity, as is clear from the surviving *typikon* for his monastery.[109] As in most private, family foundations, Gregory introduces himself in the prooemium of the *typikon*, including a brief description of his ancestry. He describes himself as "Gregory … the true son of Pakourianos now at blessed rest, the preeminent Prince of Princes, by birth from amongst those of the east from the most brilliant race (παμφανεστάτης φυλῆς) of the Georgians."[110] Gregory addresses the *typikon* to his "fathers and brothers," i.e. the band of Georgian troops who had followed him throughout his career.

Gregory speaks of his Georgian lineage in language remarkably similar to that used by aristocratic founders to describe their own illustrious genealogies. Thus, one finds the following phrases in the *typikon* of the monastery of the Virgin Kecharitomene ("of

**105** Talbot, "The Byzantine Family and the Monastery," 120; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations in the Byzantine Empire*.

**106** *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 649–724. An edition of the Greek text can be found in Paul Gautier, ed., "Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," *REB* 43 (1985): 5–165.

**107** This had parallels with, and was related to, the increasing tendency for these families to establish lavish residences in the capital as well. See Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 136–50; Matoula Kouroupou and Jean-François Vannier, "Commémoraisons des Comnènes dans le typicon liturgique du monastère du Christ Philanthrope (MS Panaghia Kamariotissa 29)," *REB* 63 (2005): 41–69.

**108** *ODB*, 1553. The Pakourianos (Bakuriani) family, who had origins in the kingdom of Tayk'/Tao, is known from at least the tenth century. The question of Gregory's ethnic background has been the topic of some debate. According to Kazhdan (*ODB*, 1553), the family probably "belonged to the mixed Armeno-Iberian Chalcedonian aristocracy, which dwelt in the border district of Tayk'/Tao."

**109** Paul Gautier, ed., "Le typikon du Sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos," *REB* 42 (1984): 5–145; an English translation can be found in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 507–63.

**110** Gautier, "Le typikon du Sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos," proem., lines 17–18: τὴν γέννησίν τε ἐκ τῶν ἑῴων ἔχοντος ἐκ τῆς τῶν Ιβήρων παμφανεστάτης φυλῆς … "The East" is a typical formulation indicating Georgia (Kartli/Iberia).

good hope"), founded by Eirene Doukaina. "Her most noble mother was herself most renowned (περιφανεστάτη) in all things, drawing the golden line of [her] *genos* from the Branai, those exceedingly glorious and famous [ones] (ἐνδόξων καὶ διαβοήτων)."[111] Again, "Their father was one of [i.e. a member] the most noble (πανευγενεστάτου) *genos* of the Palaiologoi …"[112] As in other written genres, the same stock of adjectives, verbs and other modifiers were consistently employed both for ethnic backgrounds and for family lineages in these *typika*, thereby reinforcing the similarities already apparent in the shared vocabulary for the ethnic groups or families themselves. It is difficult to argue that the aristocratic families were using the language of ethnicity or that those like Pakourianos were consciously employing the language of kinship to describe ethnic origins. The two were effectively one and the same.

The similarities extended beyond merely the language in the foundation documents. The monastery at Bačkovo served two, related purposes. First, it served a similar function for Gregory as did the many private, family monasteries of the same period. It was intended to be the location of the burial and commemoration of Gregory and his immediate family (Gregory had the remains of his brother, Apasios, reburied at the monastery after its completion).[113] Gregory himself did not have children, but, as argued by Rosemary Morris and suggested by Gregory's form of address to his band of followers, his fellow Georgians became a kind of substitute family.[114] The *genos* of the Georgians stood in for the *genos* of Pakourianos. At the same time, Pakourianos clearly envisioned the community as a home away from home for his loyal band of Georgian followers, who had been with him throughout much of his career. In one section of the *typikon* (ch. 25), Pakourianos stipulates the way in which the monks should receive relatives of the monks and any Georgian visitors.[115] The two groups ("relatives" and "Georgians") are placed side-by-side, in a parallel linguistic construction.

The *typikon* is clear in its vision of a community of almost exclusively Georgian monks who might find themselves within Byzantium's borders. This certainly reflects the sense of solidarity and exclusion of others implicit in the concept of *genos*/*phylon*. Pakourianos made explicit provisions in the *typikon* that tried to exclude non-Georgian individuals from entering the monastery as monks (that is, from joining the "family").[116]

Viewed from the perspective of monastic foundations like those described here, it was more than just vocabulary that the two (indeed, multiple) definitions of the *genos* shared in the medieval Byzantine psyche. Private, family monasteries, commonplace

**111** Gautier, "Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," proem., lines 22–24: Ἡ μήτηρ δὲ εὐγε νεστάτη μὲν ἦν καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ περιφανεστάτη ἐν πάσαις, ἑκ τῶν Βρανῶν, τῶν ἄγαν ἐνδόξων καὶ διαβοήτων ἐκείνων, ἕλκουσα τὴν τοῦ γένους χρυσέαν σειράν …

**112** Gautier, "Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," 23, lines 8–9: Ὧν ὁ μὲν πατὴρ τοῦ πανευγενεστάτου μὲν τῶν Παλαιολόγων γένους ἐτύγχανεν ἕν …

**113** Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081–1261* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 304.

**114** Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium*, 137.

**115** Gautier, "Le typikon du Sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos," 25.

**116** Gautier, "Le typikon du Sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos," 25.

by the eleventh century, served similar functions for the *genos* as kin group as those of "ethnic" foundations like Iviron did for the *genos* of the Georgians.[117] The conceptual overlap evident in the language of the sources provides a useful lens through which to view the important role of religious foundations in the social world of medieval Byzantium, and the importance of the *genos* as a more generalized concept.

## Conclusion

In May 1294, famed scholar Maximos Planoudes wrote and delivered a panegyric dedicated to Emperor Andronikos II and his son, Michael (IX), to celebrate the latter's official coronation. The oration contains much of the praise and other rhetorical tropes familiar to imperial encomia of any period in Roman and Byzantine history. Yet this oration is of particular interest because Planoudes relies on precisely the kind of linguistic and conceptual similarities among the various meanings of *genos* to make one of his central arguments. As Dimiter Angelov describes it, "Playing on the multiple meanings of the Greek word *genos*, Planoudes pointed to the Romans as the emperor's [Andronikos II] real family and described them as a warlike people, who were not traders like the Phoenicians and not simple farmers like the Egyptians."[118] It was not only the linguistic, but also the deeper, conceptual similarities between the *genos* of the Romans and the *genos* as kin group that allowed Planoudes to successfully employ his metaphor and imbued his rhetoric with meaning. Without the similarities in both form and function understood in the term, Planoudes's wordplay would be meaningless.

One's relationship with his/her *genos*, whether the *genos* of the Romans or the *genos* as family, carried with it much the same meaning, but on different scales, at least from the eleventh or twelfth century onward. Like other identity sets, which of the two forms of *genos* played a greater role in motivating a particular action or in defining an individual would depend on the circumstances and could, in fact, change from moment to moment.[119] Leonora Neville has argued, convincingly, that Byzantine society was one defined relationally, rather than in absolute terms.[120] That is, individuals understood

**117** For more complete coverage of these family monasteries, see Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*.

**118** Dimiter Angelov, "Byzantine Imperial Panegyric as Advice Literature (1204–c.1350)," in *Rhetoric in Byantium. Papers from the Thirty-fifth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Exeter College, University of Oxford, March 2001*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 55–74, 60. The text of the speech has been edited and published in three parts. See L. G. Westerink, "Le basilikos de Maxime Planude," *Byzantinoslavica* 27 (1966), 98–103; 28 (1967), 54–67; 29 (1968), 34–50.

**119** See, for example, John Haldon and Hugh Kennedy, "Regional Identities and Military Power: Byzantium and Islam ca. 600–750," in *Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World: The West, Byzantium and the Islamic World, 300–1100*, ed. Walter Pohl, Clemens Gantner, and Richard Payne (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 317–18.

**120** Leonora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 66–68.

their own position in society relative to those with whom they came in contact. Social rank was contextual, not absolute. So too, it would seem, was the *genos* to which one looked as the core social group to which he or she belonged. This was probably truer in the twelfth century than it had been in the tenth or earlier.

One must be careful not to overstate the significance of a shared vocabulary for two or more distinct phenomena. Yet, as Dion Smythe has stated, "words and language are not passive reflectors of an observable, phenomenologically distinct object or range of objects out there, rather they are part of the symbolic screen that sifts, edits and rationalizes sense-impressions and perceptions into a recognizable form … ways of thinking are influenced by the ways in which those thoughts are communicated."[121] The object of Smythe's study may have been the study of gender and the question of "negative semantic space for women," but his argument is equally true for the study of the language of kinship.

Together with *patris* (fatherland), the *genos* formed the core of Byzantine identity in any period, and both concepts could be understood at varying levels. One's *patris* might alternately appear as Constantinople or the Empire of the Romans or, on a more local level, a particular region, theme, city, or even village. Similarly, it seems the *genos* taken to be of most importance or relevance in a given situation could be expressed as that of the Romans or Christians (or even mankind) on the one end of the spectrum, or an individual family or kin group on the other. In both concepts, many of the same ideals, expectations, and connotations rang true, regardless of the size or nature of the *genos* or *patris* concerned.

Changes in the language of kinship were certainly affected by larger cultural trends of the period. It is commonly acknowledged, for example, that in the eleventh century "Hellenism, humanism and individualism came to the fore."[122] For this reason (and others), shifts in the vocabulary of kinship cannot and should not be taken as necessarily indicative of social change, at least in a simple, one-to-one binary. This is especially true for changes in kinship structures, which tend to be conservative and slow to change in almost any culture.

The aristocratic kin groups of the eleventh century and later were distinct in many ways from forms of the family found in earlier periods in Byzantium, and contemporary authors could have chosen any one of many terms to designate such families. The fact that, by the late eleventh century, Byzantine authors (and presumably many of those who have left no written record) had settled upon the ancient term *genos*, with all of the baggage such an important concept carried with it, to designate such family groups should not be brushed aside as a simple coincidence or meaningless choice. Indeed, it would only make sense that the designation of aristocratic kin groups as *genē* reflects

**121** Dion Smythe, "Women as Other," in *Men, Women, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (New York: Routledge, 1997), 154.

**122** Paul Magdalino, "Cultural Change? The Context of Byzantine Poetry from Geometres to Prodromos," in *Poetry and its Contexts in Eleventh-Century Byzantium*, ed. Floris Bernard and Kristoffel Demoen (Burlington: Ashgate, 2012), 19.

certain characteristics seen by contemporaries as reflecting those already attached to the *genos* in its other uses. This notion is supported by the linguistic evidence of the tenth through twelfth centuries.

The link between *genos* as kin group and *genos* as ethnic group, as well as the combination of local and "natural" origins inherent within Blemmydes's *genos*, is more than a simple, linguistic coincidence. In all cases, whether speaking of an ethnic group or a much smaller family unit, the use of the term *genos* clearly indicated a certain set of shared characteristics that were considered inherent and inalienable within the in-group. Belonging to a *genos*, no matter on what scale, carried with it a certain set of obligations and ideals that were largely consistent whether one was speaking of the *genos* of the Komnenoi or the *genos* of the Romans.

Chapter 3

# MARRIAGE IMPEDIMENTS AND THE CONCEPT OF FAMILY

> Ἐν τοῖς γάμοις οὐ μόνον τὸ ἐπιτετραμμένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εὐπρεπὲς καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ φύσει δίκαιον ζητοῦμεν.
>
> In marriages, we seek not only what is allowed [by law], but also that which is seemly, honourable, and just according to nature.
>
> *Basilika* 28.5.7

THE BYZANTINE *GENOS* as kin group, comprising exclusively an individual's consanguineous family, corresponded to what the legal sources refer to as "natural kinship" (*physike syggeneia*). Impediments to marriage based upon consanguinity, which effectively determined the limits of legally recognized "natural kinship," may thus be understood as equally determining the structural limits of the *genos*, at least from the perspective of civil and canon law. The civil laws governing inheritance rights, the other major area in which Byzantine law took an interest in the consanguineous family, remained largely stable from the tenth through the twelfth century, setting the outer limit of relatives of the deceased who might hope to claim some portion of his/her estate at the seventh degree of consanguinity (children of one's second cousin). This fact would come to have a significant impact on debates over the extension of marriage impediments and, thus, of the *genos*.

With the exception of eunuchs, some slaves, and those destined from an early age for the religious life, every Byzantine would expect to participate in the institution of marriage regardless of wealth or social standing, making marriage a near-universal rite of passage in the Byzantine world. The wedding ceremony and celebration, in addition to one's choice of husband or wife, involved not only the individual, but each spouse's extended family, and its importance both to the individual and to their kinsmen is reflected in a wide range of sources from all periods.[1] This near-universal significance is reflected in the language and arguments used by jurists and clergy in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, as they grappled with issues that they understood to be fundamental to human kinship.

Marriage impediments, especially as they pertained to consanguineous relations, give the clearest indication of Byzantine thinking regarding the outer limits of the singular, "natural" family and, thus, of the *genos*. Also of interest are debates that raged over the calculation of degrees of kinship as applied to affinity, necessitating as it did the clarification of the union of a husband and wife as "one flesh," for this was perhaps the only

1 In general, see Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*.

way in which, according to Byzantine reckoning, a *genos* might be expanded without the birth of a child. As evidenced by the words of Byzantines clergy and jurists themselves, the debates over the limits of non-marriageable kin amounted to no less than an interrogation of the nature of kinship and the family. It is in the surviving evidence from legal rulings and other contributions to these debates that Byzantine society formulated and altered their own culturally specific understanding of kinship and the family. In this context, it was the *genos*, not the *oikos*/household, which was the form of family in question.

## Marriage Impediments Prior to 997

Over the *longue durée*, the story of Byzantine marriage impediments is one of gradual expansion. While Emperor Augustus's first-century attempts to legislate morality within the confines of marriage and the family are well known, it was not until more than three centuries later that Constantine the Great opened the door to imperial legislative efforts to govern marriage.[2] Already in 342, the emperors Constantius and Constans outlawed uncle-niece marriages.[3] This prohibition remained largely uncontroversial and was almost universally accepted, with the famous exception of Emperor Heraclius's marriage to his niece, Martina. Another major change occurred in 691/2 CE at the so-called Quinisext Council (also known as the Council in Trullo). Among other things, the Council prohibited marriages between first cousins. It was also at this time that spiritual kinship was determined to be an impediment to marriage, thus extending prohibitions to include relationships created by baptismal sponsorship and other forms of spiritual bonds.[4] In the mid-eighth century, Emperor Leo III oversaw the production of the *Ekloga*, the first major compilation of Byzantine law following the great work of Justinian. The degree to which many of its laws were implemented in later years is difficult to know, as it was forever associated with Leo III's iconoclast policies. The *Ekloga* incorporated much of canon law into its pages, which is in keeping with the heavily Christian tone of the collection's preface.[5] It is partly for this reason that the collection devotes a great deal of space to family law, broadly defined, especially marriage. It is here, for instance, that marriage between first and second cousins was expressly prohibited by imperial law.

The reign of Leo VI (886–912) is widely recognized as a crucial moment in the history of the Byzantine family and marriage, at least from a legal standpoint. His reign witnessed the completion of the *Basilika*, a monumental collection of laws based largely

**2** Marie Therese Fögen, "Legislation in Byzantium: A Political and a Bureaucratic Technique," in *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth–Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), 57–58.

**3** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 469–70.

**4** This prohibition did not extend to the same degree as that placed on consanguineous kin. See Ruth Macrides, "The Byzantine Godfather," *BMGS* 11 (1987): 139–62; Macrides, "Kinship by Arrangement: The Case of Adoption," 109–18.

**5** Edwin H. Freshfield, ed. and trans., *A Manual of Roman Law: The Ecloga* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

on the Justinianic corpus, which would form the basis of all later Byzantine law.[6] The emperor himself also issued no fewer than 113 *novellae*, a large number of which deal with issues concerning family life, marriage, and inheritance. Leo's desire for a legitimate heir to the throne led to his marrying four times (known as the Tetragamy affair), which triggered a bitter rift among the clergy and led to a schism within the Byzantine church that would only come to an end with the so-called Tome of Union in 920. It likewise triggered significant discussion about the nature of marriage and the family. Among Leo's many *novellae*, one in particular had a lasting impact on the way in which marriage was governed. Novel 89 made the blessing of a priest mandatory for a legitimate marriage, the first time in Byzantine history that this had been done.[7]

This chapter utilizes evidence originating both from members of the clergy and from within the imperial administration, often treating the two side-by-side. While the distinction is far from irrelevant, it would be a mistake to imagine a stark division between "secular" law (i.e. imperial law) and canon law (i.e. regulations emanating from the church or clergy), at least for laws regulating marriage and other aspects of family life. Nearly all the major milestones in the formation of regulations of marriage practices originated in the church, whether from ecumenical councils, patriarchal tomes, or decisions in specific cases brought before a bishop. Though the reign of Alexios I Komnenos is sometimes regarded as the period in which the imperial throne more or less gave up its claim to authority in marriage law in deference to clerical authorities, the trend can be seen throughout most of the early and middle Byzantine periods.[8] The majority of cases involving marriage still went before civil judges in the first quarter of the eleventh century, while most such cases instead seem to have gone through episcopal courts less than fifty years later.[9] In many instances, imperial law codes (like the *Ekloga* or the *Basilika*) or *novellae* simply codified what had already been decided by church authorities. At the same time, however, both members of the aristocracy and even emperors themselves continued to exhibit a desire to control their own marriages (and, in the cases of emperors, those of other members of the elite) as a vital means of establishing links and support systems within Byzantine high society and even with foreign potentates. Even if the church had gained the upper hand in the contest for authority over marriage policies, this authority did not remain uncontested, nor would it be accurate to speak of the church as a monolith throughout the period. Some of the most stinging critiques of rulings issued by the patriarchate of Constantinople in the tenth through the thirteenth century came from members of the clergy.

In general, the views developed by the church on questions of marriage tended to be stricter than those laid out by "secular" law, though the latter was continually

**6** The monumental law code known as the *Basilika* was a codification and translation of Justinian's *Corpus Iuris Civilis* with some updates and alterations. It became the foundation of all imperial law in Byzantium from the time of its completion until the end of the empire.

**7** P. Noailles and A. Dain, ed. and trans., *Les novelles de Léon VI le sage* (Paris: Société d'édition 'Les belles lettres,' 1944), 294–96.

**8** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, esp. 412.

**9** Angold, *Church and Society under the Comneni*, 407.

adjusted to fall in line with the former. This was true of the prohibition against fourth marriages, which was already put forward by the likes of St. Basil of Caesarea in the fourth century, but which only entered formally into Byzantine law books with the Tome of Union in 920.[10] The legislation of Leo VI took measures to make betrothal more or less the equivalent of marriage, and, in doing so, referred specifically to Canon 98 of the Council in Trullo (691/2).[11] Marriage impediments for collateral and affinal kin as they appear in the law code of 741, the *Ekloga*, fell more or less completely in line with the rules agreed upon by the same church council.[12] While marriage between individuals related to the seventh degree of kinship was only deemed forbidden by law in 1166, in practice, this had been the position of the church throughout most of the eleventh century.[13] Still, despite the apparent victory of the church on this issue, it was never completely settled.

The decisions or statements established by canon law "did not really have the force of law until and unless they were incorporated in imperial legislation."[14] A further complication arises from the overlapping and, at times, conflicting spheres of influence and authority in matters concerning marriage between the church and the state. An individual in eleventh-century Byzantium could choose to take his suit or legal question either to a civil judge or an episcopal court (or perhaps both) depending on circumstances. Our current knowledge of Byzantine legal practice does not allow for a comprehensive description of the interaction between civil judges or jurists and clergy in the practice of law, especially outside of Constantinople, but this is not of immediate consequence here. Instead, the focus of this chapter remains on the philosophical, theoretical, and theological underpinnings of changing definitions of the *genos* (i.e. the singular, consanguineous family) in tenth- through twelfth-century Byzantium as presented by the evidence emanating both from the church and from the state.

## Debates Surrounding the Seventh Degree of Consanguinity, ca. 997–1166[15]

Perhaps the single most important event of the tenth century for the future of marriage controls in Byzantium occurred in February 997, when Sisinnios II, Patriarch of

**10** Angeliki Laiou, "Marriage Prohibitions, Marriage Strategies and the Dowry in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium," in *La transmission du patrimoine: Byzance et l'aire méditerranéenne*, ed. Joëlle Beaucamp and Gilbert Dagron (Paris: De Boccard, 1998), 132.

**11** See especially Novels 18 and 93, in Noailles and Dain, *Les novelles de Léon VI le sage*, 68–72, 306–8.

**12** Angeliki Laiou, "The Evolution of the Status of Women in Marriage and Family Law," in *Mother, Nun, Deaconess: Images of Women According to Eastern Canon Law*, ed. Carl G. Fürst (Egling: Kovar, 2000), 71–72.

**13** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 95–98.

**14** Laiou, "The Evolution of the Status of Women in Marriage and Family Law," 71.

**15** For more complete analyses, see especially: Pitsakes, *To κώλυμα γάμου*; Zhishman, *Das Eherecht der orientalischen Kirche*; Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*.

Constantinople, issued his so-called Tome of Sisinnios.[16] The Tome prohibited the marriage of two siblings to two first cousins, of an uncle and nephew to two sisters, and of an aunt and her niece with two brothers.[17] Beyond this ostensibly limited scope, however, the Tome of Sisinnios initiated a period of intense debate among jurists and canonists, even including emperors at times, over the definition of the family and the limits of kinship. Most of these arguments centred upon two core issues: the extension of prohibitions of marriage from the sixth to the seventh degree of consanguinity and the calculation of degrees of affinity based upon the biblical maxim that a man and his wife become "one flesh" at the time of their marital union. The former issue stemmed from a combination of factors, primarily the idea that consanguineous kinship was more powerful or more important than affinity, and a desire among some thinkers to link marriage impediments to inheritance law in the *Basilika*.[18] The latter debate focused on the interpretation and application of the Tome of Sisinnios in proposed marriages between affines, in particular the question of whether the Tome prohibited all marriages between those related to the sixth degree of affinity or simply those cases specifically mentioned by the patriarch. In both instances, it was the Tome of Sisinnios and, more importantly, its interpretation as a more broadly defined prohibition, that prompted the flurry of discussion and large number of documents that survive pertaining to such questions.

The Tome was so influential and spurred so much discussion that Sisinnios became something of a legendary figure. He was so highly regarded as an authority on marriage that numerous later works were spuriously ascribed to him. An act of Patriarch Michael Keroularios claims that Sisinnios "had frequented the law-courts from childhood and was still leafing daily through the law-books when he was grey-haired."[19] In Skylitzes's history, he is described as "a man of great renown and most highly skilled in the art of medicine."[20] This last assertion is not without significance.[21]

Unsurprisingly, the Tome of Sisinnios has attracted a large amount of attention by modern scholars, including historians of Byzantine law, church, aristocracy, and, of course, family. Andreas Schminck sees the Tome of Sisinnios as the singular moment in which the church effectively "annexed" control over the institution of marriage from

**16** Andreas Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos des Sisinnios," *Fontes Minores* 2 (1977): 215–54.

**17** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 11–19. Prior to the issuance of the Tome of Sisinnios, Canon 54 of the Council in Trullo had set the regulations on affinity. See Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 164.

**18** Primarily found in Book 45, Title 3.

**19** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 161; Venance Grumel and Jean Darrouzès, eds., *Les Regestes des actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople*, 2nd ed., vol. 1, fasc. 2–3 (Paris: Institut français d'études byzantines, 1989), no. 858.

**20** John Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, ed. Hans Thurn, *Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum*. CFHB 5. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1973, 340–41, trans. John Wortley, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History 811–1057* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 323.

**21** For more on this, see Chapter 4.

the state,[22] as did Laiou (along with Novel 26 of Emperor Leo VI).[23] Not all scholars have interpreted the Tome in such a way, however. Some have seen the primary drive for its issuance coming not from the patriarch himself, but rather from Emperor Basil II, and have argued that the decree should be understood as part of Basil's attempts to curb the growing power of the aristocracy by making it more difficult for such powerful families to reinforce their ties to one another through multiple marriages.[24] Whatever the impetus, there can be no doubt that it was a highly influential document that instigated and shaped intense discussion among Byzantine thinkers for the next few centuries.

The *genos* features prominently in the Tome. The patriarch describes marriage as the "root and pedestal of the *genos*" and "the workshop of our nature."[25] Interestingly, this language is known from Late Antique texts, where the "workshop of nature" was used to refer to the womb.[26] Such language, combined with the fact that the patriarch opens his statement with a prolonged metaphor comparing his efforts to the work of a medical doctor, seems to support Skylitzes's claim that Sisinnios was familiar with some medical teachings.[27] Consistent with many of the opinions expressed before and after him, Sisinnios seems quite clearly to have understood his task not as the extension of the legal bounds of non-marriageable kin, but as the continuing search for the limits that God and nature had already established. As part of this search, one of the most influential ideas to come out of the Tome did not belong to Sisinnios himself, but was drawn from the works of St. Basil of Caesarea penned nearly half a millennium before Sisinnios's Tome.

As quoted in the Tome, Basil's Canon 87 states that any marriage that would cause "the confusion of the names of the *genos*" is to be regarded as "incestuous" (ἀθέμιτ ος).[28] That is, any marriage in which the same individual might be described using two different kinship designations (e.g. uncle and cousin) contravenes the pre-ordained limits, established by nature, within which a marriage is incestuous. Basil and later Byzantine thinkers were of the opinion that these "names" (i.e. kinship designations) had been determined by nature itself, and thus acted as indicators of the natural order in questions of marriageability. Many of those who would weigh in on the various debates over marriage impediments in the wake of the Tome of Sisinnios would borrow not only the patriarch's final decision (the new list of un-marriageable kin), but also his language, sources, and methods of argumentation.

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**22** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos des Sisinnios," 215.

**23** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 9.

**24** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 170–71.

**25** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 12: Καὶ ἐπεὶ ῥίζαν καὶ ὑποβάθραν τοῦ γένους, καὶ τῆς ἠμετέρας φύσεως ἐργαστήριον, τὸν σεμνὸν γάμον ᾔδεσαν ὄντα …

**26** Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 545.

**27** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 11–12.

**28** Rhalles and Potles, vol. 5, 16: Ἐν οἷς, φησὶ, τὰ τοῦ γένους συγχέονται ὀνόματα, ἐν τούτοις ὁ γάμος ἀθέμιτος. The same idea is later expressed in the Tome simply as the "intermingling of the *genos*" (συγχύσεις τοῦ γένους).

The Tome of Sisinnios prompted the use of degrees to calculate prohibitions based on affinity for the first time in Byzantine history, the first known use of which was in 1025 by Eustathios Romaios.[29] According to some Byzantine commentators, Sisinnios's Tome did not simply prohibit marriages between the specific relations mentioned in the text, but between any two people related to the sixth degree of affinity.[30] Others, many of whom were serving or had previously served as judges in the imperial bureaucracy, preferred a stricter interpretation of the text. The former party seems to have gained the upper hand rather quickly, and, as a result, the debate quickly moved from the issue of affinity to that of marriage among consanguineous kin. For, the reasoning went, if marriage was prohibited for reasons of affinity to the sixth degree, it would only be right that the prohibitions among consanguines (then also set at the sixth degree) should be extended to reflect the relative importance of the bond of blood.[31] The number of known decisions concerning marriage impediments stemming from either the patriarchal synod or individual bishops increases dramatically after the issuance of the Tome of Sisinnios. Some of this may be the result of chance survivals, but the lack of mention in contemporary sources strongly suggests that the church and state simply were not as interested in marriage impediments prior to this period.[32] Extensions of marriage impediments, especially among consanguines, were relatively rare occurrences in Byzantium, making the explosion of debate in the aftermath of the Tome's dissemination all the more significant.

For much of the eleventh and early twelfth century, the debate raged over the issue of the seventh degree of consanguinity, which was not prohibited by the *Basilika* or imperial *novellae* (until 1166), but which the church increasingly viewed as off limits beginning in the 1020s.[33] Seemingly triggered by the Tome of Sisinnios, jurists and clergy were able to assert their positions based largely on a truism found repeated in both secular and canon law throughout this period, which stated that, in questions of potential marriages, one ought to seek out "not only that which is allowed by law, but also that which is seemly, honourable, and just according to nature."[34] This clause, which was

**29** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 174.

**30** Degrees of affinity, a new phenomenon in eleventh-century Byzantium, were found by first identifying the marriage that produced the affinity between the man and woman in question. Then the number of degrees separating each of them with their respective kinsman (by blood) in that marriage were simply added together. So, for example, if a man and a woman were already linked because of the marriage of his first cousin (related to him to the fourth degree) with her sister (her relative at the second degree), the two of them would then be considered relatives at the sixth degree of affinity.

**31** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 408.

**32** The monumental work of Pitsakes, still the only major work dedicated solely to the extension of marriage prohibitions to the seventh degree of consanguinity, begins his study in the patriarchate of Alexios the Stoudite. See Pitsakes, *Τὸ κώλυμα γάμου*.

**33** See Pitsakes, *Τὸ κώλυμα γάμου.*

**34** D 23.2.42 = *Basilika* 28.5.7, quoted in Pitsakes, *Τὸ κώλυμα γάμου*, 4: Ἐν τοῖς γάμοις οὐ μόνον τὸ ἐπιτετραμμένον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ εὔπρεπὲς καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ φύσει δίκαιον ζητοῦμεν.

perhaps the single most foundational precept guiding nearly all inquiries into marriage impediments in Byzantium from the fourth century to the fourteenth, was originally stated by the famed jurist Herennius Modestinus in the mid-third century CE and subsequently repeated in both Justinian's sixth-century *Digest* and the tenth-century *Basilika*. It allowed both imperial officials and clergy a certain amount of freedom of movement when it came to deciding marriage impediments. It also opened the field for theological or philosophical arguments designed to establish the limits of the individual *genos*, thereby deciding the theoretical underpinnings of what could be deemed "seemly."[35]

Patriarch Alexios Stoudites (1025–1043), along with the synod of bishops, summed up contemporary law regarding marriage impediments in a synodal decision (ἀπόφασις συνοδική): "The law allows the marriage of those who are of the eighth degree [of consanguinity] to one another, and prohibits those of the sixth. As for those related to the seventh degree, [the law] nowhere allows it [explicitly], nor is it completely denied, and because of this, [when] doubts similar [to this case] have often been put in motion … such a marriage has not been allowed before it has taken place, but after it happens, it is not dissolved, though those who have thus been joined [in marriage] are subjected to punishments (i.e. penance) …"[36] The list of known decisions emanating from the synod of bishops in the eleventh century bears out the unsettled nature of this question in episcopal courts.

The decision in which Stoudites delivered the summary quoted here, issued in April of 1038, declared that, since the marriage in question had already been contracted, the spouses were allowed to maintain their relationship and suffered only some requisite penance.[37] In a case less than fourteen years later, however, the metropolitan bishop of Corinth prevented a proposed marriage between a man and woman related to the eighth degree of consanguinity, a decision that received support from Patriarch Michael Keroularios.[38] Another case dated to March or April 1092 saw the patriarchal synod sanction the contested marriage of an uncle and his niece with an aunt and her nephew (amounting to the sixth degree of affinity), long after the broader interpretation of the Tome of Sisinnios had gained a consensus of support among the clergy.[39] Such flexibility in the enforcement of canon law was not unique to this period, especially in marriage litigation, because of the principle of *oikonomia*, which allowed bishops to freely grant

**35** For a good example of this, see Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 389–90.

**36** Rhalles and Potles, vol. 5, 36–37: ὁ δὲ δὴ νόμος ἐπιτρέπει τοῖς ὀγδόου βαθμοῦ πρὸς ἀλλήλους οὖσι τὸν γάμον, ἀπαγορεύει δὲ τοῖς τοῦ ἕκτου, τοῖς γε μὴν ἑβδόμου οὐδαμοῦ οὔτε ἐπιτρέπει, οὔτε ἀπαρνεῖται, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πολλάκις ὁμοίων ἀμφισβητήσεων κινηθειςῶν … τὸν τοιοῦτον γάμον, πρὸ μὲν τοῦ προβῆναι, μὴ ἐπιτρέπεσθαι, μετὰ δὲ τὸ γενέσθαι, μὴ διασπᾶσθαι μὲν, ἐπιτιμίοις δὲ τοὺς οὕτω συναφθέντας καθυποβάλλεσθαι …

**37** Grumel and Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 844.

**38** Grumel, *Regestes*, no. 858; Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 40–45.

**39** Grumel and Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 961.

exceptions to some individuals based upon context. This is precisely why many cases came before episcopal rather than civil courts.[40]

The patriarchate of Alexios Stoudites (1025–1043) was an important moment in the church's position on marriage impediments.[41] His time as Patriarch of Constantinople saw the controversy over the seventh degree of consanguinity reach the imperial throne in the contested marriage of soon-to-be emperor Romanos (III) Argyros. Romanos, who at the time held the position of Eparch of the City (of Constantinople), was handpicked by Constantine VIII to be his successor. Part of the agreement, however, was that the candidate marry one of Constantine's two eligible daughters. There was one major issue: Romanos was already married. Sources differ on the details, but one way or another, his first wife took the monastic habit, which allowed Romanos to re-marry. The difficulties of the proposed match, however, were not over. Nearly all sources agree that Romanos was a blood relative of Constantine's daughters. While most regarded him as a third cousin (related to the eighth degree), Yahya of Antioch records that Romanos's grandfather was brother-in-law to Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, meaning Romanos and his new wife were related to the seventh degree of consanguinity.[42] Theodora, the younger of the two sisters, is recorded as having refused the proposed marriage, perhaps on the grounds of kinship, though her older sister, Zoe, acquiesced to her father's wishes.[43] The marriage of Romanos to Zoe was eventually permitted by Patriarch Alexios, who received the support of the synod of bishops, though it was long remembered as a controversial union whose legitimacy was forever suspect.[44]

The link between the Tome of Sisinnios and the eventual expansion of marriage prohibitions to the seventh degree of consanguinity also emerges for the first time in sources during this time. An *hypomnema* (legal recommendation) issued in 1025 in the name of Eustathios Romaios, the most well-known secular jurist of eleventh-century Byzantium, is the longest of three texts of this genre to survive from this period.[45] In the lengthy

**40** Ioannis M. Konidaris, "The Ubiquity of Canon Law," in *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1994), 134–35.

**41** Pitsakes, *Τὸ κώλυμα γάμου*, 149–83.

**42** Pitsakes, *Το κώλυμα γάμου*, 149–50; Laiou, "Imperial Marriages and their Critics in Eleventh-Century Byzantium," 165–76.

**43** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 374; John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories*, ed. T. Büttner-Wobts, *Ioannis Zonarae epitome historiarum libri XIII usque ad XVIII*. Bonn: Teubner, 1897, 3.573. Some sources claim that Theodora's refusal was motivated by the fact that Romanos Argyros's previous wife still lived, while others suggest that her kinship with Romanos was the primary reason.

**44** Grumel and Darrouzès, *Regestes*, no. 836. The full text of the synod's decision does not survive. All that remains is a brief notice indicating that the "doubt" surrounding the issue had "been resolved" by the church.

**45** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 163. The full text has been published by Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 341–53. The decision is reproduced in part in the *Peira*. All three *hypomnemata* surviving from the first half of the eleventh century are attributed to Eustathios, a testament to his importance among Byzantine jurists.

text, Eustathios carefully avoids explicit mention of the seventh degree of consanguinity, probably an indication that it was already a controversial topic.[46] Nevertheless, the opposing counsel seems to have argued that the biblical contention that a husband and wife become "one flesh" meant that the bonds of affinity were even stronger than those of shared blood. Eustathios reduces this argument to absurdity and, in the process, makes clear his opinion that the bonds of blood were far stronger and, indeed, more important than those produced through the marriage of a relative.[47] "For who would rightly say that the kinsman through marriage is closer than one through blood …? No one, I think, in their right mind."[48] It is precisely this opinion that paved the way for the expansion of impediments from the sixth to the seventh degree of consanguinity. For if the Tome of Sisinnios should be understood as expanding marriage impediments to anyone related to the sixth degree of affinity, then it would only be right that impediments among consanguineous kin be expanded beyond the sixth degree, if the latter bonds were indeed more potent than the former.

The *hypomnema* of 1025 also offers a wealth of other information regarding the *genos* as the form of the family most involved in questions of marriage. Eustathios takes up the oft-quoted passage from Modestinus that a legislator should look not only for what is allowed, but that which is "decent and noble."[49] He contends that the original purpose of this phrase was not to prevent the mingling of blood, but to "procure solemnity for the senatorial class (γένος)."[50] Eustathios's use of the term *genos* to describe the older Roman senatorial class is probably not accidental. Rather, it may have been meant to evoke the arguments made by his opponents, who often cited Modestinus's admonition in order to claim that their extension of marriage prohibitions was designed to prevent the co-mingling of individuals within the same *genos* (singular family). For, while Eustathios may have opened the door to arguments proceeding from the Tome of Sisinnios to the seventh degree of consanguinity, his primary argument in the *hypomnema* was, in fact, for a more limited reading of the Tome's prohibitions and an approach generally more conservative and more grounded in Roman law and legal precedence.

Eustathios also engages with the widespread use of Basil of Caesarea's theory of kinship. He notes that even a marriage between third cousins, related to the eighth degree of kinship (and, thus, legal), produced a confusion of designations. Since Byzantine Greek was capable of indicating "third cousins" (τρισεξάδελφος), the marriage would have made the

**46** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 163–66. The case on which Eustathios was commenting involved the proposed marriage between two sets of first cousins.

**47** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 345; Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 166.

**48** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 345: … τίς ἂν ὀρθῶς εἴποι τὸν ἐξ ἀγχιστείας συγγενῆ, οἰκειότερον εἶναι τοῦ ἐξ αἵματος …; Οὐδεὶς οἶμαι νοῦν ἔχων. See also Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 166.

**49** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 171.

**50** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 351.

couple simultaneously third cousins and spouses to one another.[51] From this, Eustathios concludes that the simple "clash of designations" (σύγκρουσις) was not enough to invalidate a marriage if it was not explicitly forbidden by the law.[52] He insists that a marriage between third cousins did not produce a "mingling of the blood" and was therefore perfectly legal. Parts of Eustathios Romaios's opinion were repeated roughly two decades later by Patriarch Michael Keroularios, who argues that "no one in their right mind would say that one related [to another] through marriage, called 'kinsman' in a misuse of language, is just as close or closer [to that person] as one related by *genos* and blood."[53]

Yet another critic of the Tome of Sisinnios, Michael Skribas, offers some of the best evidence of the early eleventh-century Byzantine interpretation of the *genos* in questions of marriage law more generally. The so-called "*antirrhetikos logos*" (lit. "refutation"), written by Skribas in the 1030s, delivers a typical critique of the Tome of Sisinnios.[54] Michael criticizes his contemporaries who supported the Tome of Sisinnios and attacks the logic employed by those who wanted to extend Sisinnios's ruling by reminding them of the very definition of the *genos*. For, he argues, a marriage between affines could never result in what Basil the Great called a "mixing of the names/designations of the *genos*," since the *genos* does not include affines. " 'Affinity is the relationship of persons joined to us by marriage outside of/beyond kinship.' If, then, they are found placed outside of kinship by the new lawgivers, [there is] no mixing of the *genē*, no exchanging of names."[55] To clarify his point, Michael continues his exposition of the legal standing of affines by offering a hypothetical: "What kinship (συγγένεια) or relationship of blood (αἵματος οἰκείωσις) is observed between myself and the cousin of my brother's wife? No kinship is recognized among said persons whatsoever, since they are of a different *genos* and blood."[56] Skribas reiterates his point a second time. "It is thus demonstrated that those entering [into a relationship based on] affinity share no kinship (συγγενείας) whatsoever."[57] Ever the meticulous jurist, Michael Skribas follows the letter of the law (the

**51** The designation of "third cousin" (τρισεξάδελφος) is extremely rare throughout most Byzantine sources, but it appears regularly in legal writing.

**52** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 168–69.

**53** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 42: Οὐδεὶς οὖν ὀρθῶς εἴποι, τὸν ἐξ ἀγχιστείας συνημμένον, καὶ συγγενῆ καταχρηστικῶς ἐπωνομασμένον, οἰκειότερον ἢ ἴσον εἶναι τῷ ἐκ τοῦ γένους καὶ αἵματος.

**54** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos," 215–54. The opinion survives in a single manuscript housed in the Marcian Library of Venice, Codex Marcianus gr. 173.

**55** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos," 224–45: δεῖ δὲ πρότερον τὸν ἀγχιστείας ὅρον ἐπελθεῖν καὶ δεῖξαι, ὡς ἐξ ἀγχιστείας συγγένεια οὐκ ἔστιν. ἀγχιστεία τοίνυν ἐστὶν, οἰκειότης προσώπων ἑκ γάμων ἠμῖν συνημμένη συγγενείας ἑκτός.' Εἰ οὖν ἑκτὸς συγγενείας καὶ τὰ παρὰ τῶν νέων νομοθετῶν τιθέμενα πρόσωπα εὑρίσκονται, οὐδεμία σύγχυσις τῶν γενῶν, οὐδὲ τῶν ὀνομάτων ἄμειψις.

**56** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos," 225: ποία γὰρ συγγένεια θεωρεῖται μεταξὺ ἐμοῦ καὶ τῆς ἐξαδέλφης τῆς γαμετῆς τοῦ ἐμοῦ ἀδελφοῦ ἢ αἵματος οἰκείωσις; οὐδεμία γὰρ συγγένεια πρὸς τὰ εἰρημένα πρόσωπα κατανοεῖται, ἐτέρου γένους ἐκείνων καὶ αἵματος καθισταμένων …

**57** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos," 226: Δείκνυται γοῦν ἐντεῦθεν τοὺς ἐξ ἀγχιστείας ἐρχομένους μηδεμίαν συγγενείας κοινωνίαν ἔχειν.

*Basilika*), including the provision that legally recognized kinship (*syggeneia*) includes only consanguineous kin (and is thus equivalent to the *genos*).

Skribas, like many of his contemporaries, slightly altered the words of Basil of Caesarea, so that what appears in Basil's canons as the "mingling of the names of the *genos*" becomes the "mingling of *genos*/*genē*." The difference may be minor, but, taken at face value, the alteration has real consequences for the image of the *genos* presented by those involved in marriage disputes. The anonymous critique of the Tome of Sisinnios sometimes attributed to Eustathios Romaios displays the same tendency to separate Basil of Caesarea's ideas about the "mixing of names of the *genos*" into two separate ideas, the "confusion of names" and the "mixing of the *genē*." The desire to avoid incestuous marriage is described as the desire "that the *genē* will not be comingled and the order of names [i.e. kinship designations] be confused."[58] Eleventh- and twelfth-century canonists nearly always refer to potential marriage partners as coming from separate *genē*, even if they were related to the eighth degree of consanguinity. Incestuous marriages, then, would be tantamount to the marriage of two individuals within the same *genos*, hence the phrase "the intermingling of the *genos*."

For example, in one decision of the synod of bishops (συνοδικὴ ψῆφος) in Constantinople, issued in the name of Patriarch Michael Keroularios in 1057, two women (a great aunt and her niece) are described as coming "from a different line (σειρᾶς) and *genos*" than their respective marriage partners (two male first cousins). The same piece describes marriage itself as "the union of distinct *genē*" (τὴν τῶν διῃρημένων γενῶν σ υνάφειαν).[59] The opinion also states that the potential union, deemed to be incestuous, produces the "confusion of names" familiar from Basil of Caesarea's writings, borrowing Basil's words in describing it as the "mingling of the *genē*."[60] Here, the correlation between the "confusion of [the names] of the *genos*" and the "mixing of the blood of kin" is made explicit.[61] A marriage that would contravene the established regulations governing marriage between consanguines would result, in the words of Keroularios's decision, in the "defilement and destruction of the *genos*, the disorder of kinship, unbridled mixing, and [would be] inconsistent with the legal order."[62]

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**58** Andreas Schminck, "Vier eherechtliche Entscheidungen aus dem 11. Jahrhundert," *Fontes Minores* 3 (1979): 252.

**59** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 41. The potential marriage partners are described as "δύο γὰρ ἐξάδελφοι πρῶτοι πρὸς θείαν μεγάλην καὶ ἀνεψιὰν, [ἐξ] ἑτέρας σειρᾶς καὶ γένους ὡρμημένας."

**60** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 44: ὡς ἐκ τούτου συγχύσεως τῶν γενῶν ἐπισυμβαινούσης, καὶ τῶν ὀνομάτων συμπτώσεως …

**61** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 43: … καὶ τὴ σύγχυσιν τοῦ γένους, καὶ τὴν ἐπιμιξίαν τοῦ συγγενικοῦ αἵματος … This correlation has important implications, explored in the following chapter.

**62** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 42: μολυσμὸς γὰρ τοῦτο γένους καὶ φθορὰ, καὶ συγγενείας φυρμὸς, καὶ μίξις ἀκόλαστος, καὶ τῇ νομικῇ διατάξει ἀντίθετος.

Like that of Alexios Stoudites, the patriarchate of Michael Keroularios (1043–1059) is widely considered a turning point in the position of the church, both relative to the emperor and to lay society as a whole.[63] Importantly, under these two successive patriarchs, marriage litigation began appearing before ecclesiastical courts much more frequently than it had previously. In a broader context, the eleventh century witnessed the expansion of the power and influence of the patriarchate of Constantinople to the point that, from the mid-1050s until the coup of Alexios I Komnenos in 1081, several emperors from Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057–1059) to Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078–1081) owed their thrones almost entirely to the favour of contemporary patriarchs and the church.[64]

Beyond the dissemination and discussion of the Tome of Sisinnios, a number of other social and cultural phenomena combined to make the eleventh century a pivotal moment in the history of the family and family law in Byzantium. The period witnessed repeated attempts by members of the aristocracy to reinforce family alliances through multiple marriages, a form of "endogamy" that seems to have already begun in the tenth century, at least among the powerful families of Anatolia (e.g. the Phokades, Maleïnoi, and Skleroi).[65] It was during this same era, during which the Byzantine aristocracy intensified its collective efforts to entrench themselves as a kind of aristocracy by birth (with only limited success), that the surviving evidence of canonical debates over the extension of marriage impediments to relatives of the seventh degree becomes much more profuse. The eleventh century was also a high point for Byzantine jurisprudence, represented especially by the surviving records of Eustathios Romaios. This is largely the result of Constantine IX's establishment of a legal faculty in Constantinople.[66] It is in this context that the issue of marriage impediments and the definition and limits of the natal family were revisited by both clergy and secular jurists.

Angeliki Laiou has argued that the extension of marriage impediments in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was not an attempt to limit the possibility for families to concentrate or reconstitute wealth, though this was certainly a constant concern in a society that favoured (and legislated) partible inheritance. Rather, the move toward stricter regulations and increased enforcement probably had more to do with "the inherent logic of the moral, religious and legal precepts that had governed the earlier prohibitions."[67] The particular logic for this extension of marriage impediments to the seventh degree seems to have varied and largely depended on the individual judge or clergy member whose written opinion survives to today.[68] Nevertheless, surviving evidence does suggest

**63** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 119–27.

**64** Angold, *Church and Society under the Comneni*, 23–26.

**65** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 23–25.

**66** Schminck, "Vier eherechtliche Entscheidungen," 221–79.

**67** Laiou, "Marriage Prohibitions, Marriage Strategies and the Dowry in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium," 133.

**68** For a detailed analysis, see Pitsakes, *Το κώλυμα γάμου*, 1–83.

that certain ideas played a highly influential role in the thought of numerous clergy and jurists who were instrumental in the expansion of marriage prohibitions to the seventh degree of consanguinity.

## The Seventh Degree of Consanguinity and the "Life of Men"

Perhaps second only to the theory of names put forth by Basil the Great in his Canon 87, jurists and clergy of the eleventh century and later repeatedly cite a statement found in the *Basilika* in order to justify the extension of marriage prohibitions from the sixth to the seventh degree of consanguinity. Near the end of the section on inheritance, there is an enigmatic sentence apparently designed as a rationale for limiting those family members who might be eligible to receive some portion of the inheritance at the seventh degree of consanguinity. The passage reads, "We have not passed beyond the seventh degree in [our discussion of] natural kinship, for nature does not allow the life of men (τὴν ζωὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων) to extend beyond this degree."[69] The question of what, exactly, was meant by "the life of men" is not at all clear, and there is considerable evidence that eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantines may have felt the same way. Still, it became a cornerstone in arguments made by jurists and, especially, clergy who sought to extend marriage impediments from the sixth degree to the seventh.

The original Latin text of the phrase can be traced to Late Antiquity, and it continued to be reproduced in the Byzantine period, appearing not only (in Greek translation) in the *Basilika*, but also in Michael Attaleiates's widely circulated legal handbook, the *Ponema Nomikon*, produced in the mid-eleventh century.[70] Importantly, the phrase begins to appear from the early eleventh century in support of arguments over marriage impediments, being cited and discussed by several bishops and Eustathios Romaios. Despite the fact that it originally appeared in a legal context regarding inheritance, its use by bishops and judges ruling on marriage impediments is symptomatic of a larger trend at this time both to impose greater social control by the church and state and to find what might be termed a "unified theory" of the singular, consanguineous family. In some ways, at least, this was a theory of the *genos* as a family group.

While the passage was cited in several cases involving contested marriages in this period, most are devoid of any additional comment on the phrase's precise meaning. So, for

**69** *Basilika* 45.2.2 (= *Synopsis Basilicorum* B.I.5): Ἐν τῇ φυσικῇ συγγενείᾳ τὸν ἕβδομον βαθμὸν οὐ παρεξερχόμεθα. Οὐ γὰρ ἡ φῦσις ἀνέχεται ὑπὲρ τοῦτον τὸν βαθμὸν τὴν ζωὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπεκτείνεσθαι. Note that ζωή was, in patristic literature, frequently contrasted with βίος. The latter designated mere physical existence, while ζωή signified eternal or spiritual life. See also: Bryan S. Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory*, *Theory*, third ed. (London: SAGE, 2008), 1–2.

**70** *Digest* 38.10.4 proem., ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Digesta Iustiniani Augusti* (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1870): Non facile autem, quod ad nostrum ius attinet, cum de naturali cognatione quaeritur, septimum gradum quis excedit, quatenus ultra eum fere gradum rerum natura cognatorum vitam consistere non patitur.

example, is the case of Demetrios Sygkellos, the metropolitan bishop of Cyzicus, who uses the enigmatic passage to defend his approval of a contested marriage between two people related to the eighth degree.[71] Demetrios, who served as the metropolitan bishop of Cyzicus in the 1030s and 1040s, wrote at least two decisions regarding contested marriages. Like many of his contemporaries, Demetrios describes marriage partners as coming from different *genē*, and uses primarily Basil of Caesarea and the *Basilika* to defend his positions. Where Demetrios's work becomes interesting is in his defence of marriages between those related to the eighth degree of consanguinity. In a reply (ἀπάντησις) to another, unnamed individual who had declared such a marriage invalid, Demetrios states that "such a degree [of kinship] has never been forbidden. 'In natural kinship we do not pass beyond the seventh degree, for nature does not permit the life of men to extend beyond this degree.' " The metropolitan does not comment further upon the quote, but the very fact of its use in this context is a testament to the impulse found in many similar works, which attempted to unify the limits of the singular family found in inheritance and marriage law. In fact, Demetrios himself cites inheritance law in two separate cases to support his position on the prohibition of marriage between those related to the seventh degree of consanguinity.[72]

The passage is also discussed in another, anonymous work sometimes ascribed to Eustathios Romaios.[73] The commentary provides a hypothetical situation in which a marriage is proposed between a man and the daughter of his second cousin (i.e. related to the seventh degree). The author relates how such a union is not explicitly prohibited by either canon or secular law (οὔτε νόμος οὔτε θεῖοι κανόνες εὑρίσκονται ῥητῶς διακωλύσαντες).[74] Still, as the author shows, this marriage would not be without complications. He quotes the passage from the *Basilika* concerning the seventh degree of kinship, including the phrase about the "life of men." This commentary is especially important thanks to the discussion of the difficult passage that immediately follows its introduction into the text, an apparent rarity among surviving sources.

The anonymous author, like several critics of the move to expand marriage impediments, stresses the fact that this law was originally intended solely for inheritance law, not for marriage.[75] He then offers a critique of the troublesome passage by pointing out the difficulty in comprehending its intended meaning. "And it is necessary to clarify, whether nature has prevented the bearing of children beyond the seventh degree and, hence, withholds the production of offspring, as if making the seventh degree a limit to that [particular] *genos*, or, that the first principle of birth [or of the offspring] is not alive long enough to survive beyond the seventh degree."[76] Importantly, while the anonymous treatise offers clear evidence that there were those legal thinkers who believed that it

**71** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 566–68.

**72** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 361, 366–67.

**73** Schminck, "Vier eherechtliche Entscheidungen," 221–79, esp. 252–67.

**74** Schminck, "Vier eherechliche Entscheidungen," 253–54.

**75** Schminck, "Vier eherechliche Entscheidungen," 254–55.

**76** Schminck, "Vier eherechliche Entscheidungen," 254–55: Καὶ πρῶτον μὲν ὁ εἰρημένος νόμος οὐ περὶ γάμου, ὡς εἴρηται, ἐκπεφώνηται, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς ἐξ ἀδιαθέτου κληρονομίας. Καὶ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ νόμιμον

did. While the commentator argues against the passage's use in legal cases involving contested marriages, he does offer an interpretation that explicitly links the idea with the limits of the *genos*.

Around 1092 Niketas, bishop of Ankyra, composed a treatise at the request of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos to outline the tenets of Byzantine law concerning prohibited marriages, including a very brief timeline of major changes in Byzantine policy.[77] Beyond the text's importance as an illustration of the interest of Emperor Alexios I in marriage law, it also contains a reference to the passage in the *Basilika* regarding "the life of men." "And in the [title of the *Basilika*] concerned with inheritance it is written explicitly thus: 'truly we have not continued beyond the seventh degree of natural kinship; for nature does not allow the life of men to extend beyond this degree.' And it seems to me from this, and not unreasonably, that marriages ought to be limited at this degree as well. For if the legislator extended the law to such [a degree] concerning these things, how would it not be right also that those overseeing decency should limit marriage in this way?"[78] This rationale, rarely made explicit, lies behind the majority of cases in which the problematic passage from the *Basilika* was used to support the extension of marriage impediments to the seventh degree of consanguinity.

Based upon the discussions outlined here, seems that the idea expressed by "the life of men" may have been interpreted as follows. When a man and woman produce a child, that child reproduces some essential part of each parent, usually expressed in Byzantine thought by blood, though, it is of course reproduced imperfectly, as the two become intermingled. This is precisely why authors in eleventh-century Byzantium frequently refer to siblings as "*homaimones*" (ὁμαίμονες), "those of the same blood." With each successive generation, traces of the original man or woman's blood (or essence) become further diluted until, at some point, they effectively disappear altogether. The implication would thus be that the seventh degree of kinship is the outer limit within which shared blood is detectable.

This interpretation is supported by another opinion on marriage impediments, the same *hypomnema* of Eustathios Romaios discussed above. As part of the decision delivered in April of 1025, Eustathios describes how the "blood of the genitor" is divided amongst

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βαθείας δεῖται φρενός, ὥστε ἀνεπίληπτον τὴν ἐρμηνείαν ἐκλαληθῆναι. Καὶ δεῖ εἰπεῖν, πότερον ὡς τῆς φύσεως ἀπαγορευσάσης μετὰ τὸν ἕβδομον βαθμὸν γεννᾶν καὶ ἐντεῦθεν συγκαλύπτεσθαι τὴν παιδοποιίαν καὶ ὡσανεὶ τῷ γένει ἐκείνῳ συντέλειαν ἐπάγοντος τοῦ ἑβδόμου βαθμοῦ ἢ ὡς τοῦ πρώτου αἰτίου τῆς γεννήσεως τὴν ζωὴν μὴ ἐξικανοῦντος ὑπερελάσαι καὶ τὸν ἕβδομον βαθμόν.

**77** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 22.

**78** Jean Darrouzès, ed., *Documents inédits d'ecclésiologie byzantine* (Paris: Institut Français d'études byzantines, 1966), 271–72: Καὶ ἐν τῷ περὶ κληρονομίας διαρρήδην οὕτω γέγραπται '"Οντως φυσικῆς συγγενείας τὸν ἕβδομον βαθμὸν οὐ παρεξερχόμεθα·οὐτὲ γὰρ ἡ φύσις ἀνέχεται ὑπὲρ τὸν βαθμὸν τὴν ζωὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐξεκτείνεσθαι.' Καὶ δοκεῖ μοι κάκ τούτου καὶ οὐκ ἀπεικότως μέχρι καὶ τοῦ τοιούτου βαθμοῦ καὶ τὰ τῶν γάμων περικλείεσθαι. Εἰ γὰρ περὶ πραγμάτων ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον τὰ τῆς νομοθεσίας ὁ νομοθέτης ἐξέτεινε, πῶς οὐ πρέπον ἐν τούτῳ καὶ τὰ τῶν γάμων ὁρίζεσθαι τοὺς τὸ εὔσχημον ἐπισκοποῦντες.

his offspring and how the process is repeated in each new generation.[79] Ludwig Burgmann describes this portion of Eustathios's text as a "metaphor," and he largely dismisses its utility as a window into the Byzantine jurist's thought.[80] The eleventh-century jurist, however, may have been rather more serious in his assertion. Byzantine law, both civil and canon, differentiated between marriages that would be deemed incestuous and those that were simply forbidden by law. In most of the legal and canonical literature concerning marriage impediments for reasons of consanguinity, the chief concern is to prevent incest (ἀθέμιτος γάμος), an idea also expressed in Byzantium as the "mixing of blood" (αἰμομιξία).[81] The implication is that all those within the prescribed limits of consanguinity share too much of the same "blood," rendering any future marriages among them incestuous.[82]

However one interprets "the life of men," it is clear that it played a central role in producing a kind of unified theory of the (consanguineous) family as numerous authorities throughout the eleventh century cited the text to defend the extension of marriage impediments to the seventh degree of consanguinity. In doing so, they were consciously bringing marriage law into agreement with far older inheritance law. Judging by the universalizing statements found in much of the discourse surrounding this development, many of the jurists and canonists behind the expansion were probably pleased by it.

## The Komnenoi and the Meaning of "One Flesh"

Though the debates over the seventh degree of consanguinity were most heated in the mid-eleventh century, marriage impediments and marriage law more generally remained important issues throughout the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) and beyond. Marriage law, in fact, became a flashpoint in the on-going redefinition of the relationship between the church and the state (as embodied by the emperor), as well as between the church and society more broadly. Alexios issued a number of *novellae* concerning marriage, though he eventually deferred most such matters to the church. Under the rule of the Komnenoi (1081–1185), emperors continued to present imperial power as holding dominion over the Byzantine church. Michael Angold has argued, however, that this, was only "a veneer. The balance of power was shifting decisively towards the church, as it came to assume greater responsibility for the direction of society."[83] Prior to mid-eleventh century, the church had exercised little social control. This was no longer true by the first half of the thirteenth century, due in part to a series of reform-minded patriarchs of Constantinople and in part to the *modus vivendi* developed by Alexios

**79** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 343. Ἀπὸ πατρὸς τὸ ἑκ τῆς γονῆς αἷμα εἰς δύο σχισθὲν ἀδελφὰς, εἶθ'ἑξῆς εἰς τοὺς τούτων παῖδας …

**80** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 165.

**81** Leviticus 18:6; *Basilika* 60.37.75; Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 21; Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 43.

**82** The Byzantines themselves were imprecise in their use of the term "incest." Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 21.

**83** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 6.

I Komnenos and his successors vis-à-vis the church hierarchy.[84] It almost certainly contributed to the weakness of imperial authority, as Angold argues, but it also meant that canon law and debates among clergy regarding marriage impediments had a much more immediate effect on Byzantine society as a whole.[85]

The Komnenoi have long been known for their attempts to control the marriage alliances contracted by both members of the imperial family and even those among the elite not directly linked to them. This was especially true for Alexios I's grandson, Manuel I Komnenos (r. 1143–1180), who truly seems to have treated marriages among the extended imperial family as "matters of state."[86] He personally weighed in on several of the most important ecclesiastical debates concerning marriage impediments during his reign, in addition to legislating the expansion of marriage impediments to the seventh degree of consanguinity.[87] Manuel even tried to have the Tome of Sisinnios repealed, which met with considerable opposition from the clergy, including Theodore Balsamon, who was otherwise a champion of patriarchal cooperation with the imperial seat.[88] At the same time, the twelfth century also saw the continued expansion of the control over marriage exercised by patriarchs of Constantinople, who increasingly viewed the "moral supervision of marriage as an important element in their pastoral duties."[89]

Paul Magdalino, echoed by Angold, has shown that Manuel I's dynastic policies and attempts to control marriages among the Byzantine elite were closely linked with his foreign policy.[90] As Magdalino himself attests, however, it is very difficult to link any of Manuel's edicts or particular interventions in canon or secular law with any specific betrothals or marriages. He most often simply confirmed statements made by the patriarchal synod (a phenomenon well-attested in earlier centuries as well). It has been pointed out that the language employed in Manuel's edicts regarding marriage is often "academic" and "disinterested," which seemly contradicts the enthusiasm with which Manuel attempted to ensure the continued success of his dynasty through effective control of marriage policy.[91] The contradiction is made even more apparent in a *pittakion* issued by Manuel I in 1172. In it, Manuel speaks of the "Latins." They might err when it comes to the procession of the Holy Spirit, and they ignore the prohibitions of marriage between affines, but "they are punctilious in their respect for ties of consanguinity—and in this they put the Byzantines to shame."[92] It is significant that Manuel wished to make

**84** Angold, *Church and Society under the Comneni*, passim.

**85** Angold, *Church and Society under the Comneni*, 7.

**86** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos,* 205.

**87** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 214.

**88** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 1, 291; Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 214.

**89** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni,* 416.

**90** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 215–17; Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 412–13.

**91** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 214.

**92** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 216. For the full text of the *pittakion*, see Jean Darrouzès, "Questions de droit matrimonial: 1172–1175," *REB* 35 (1977)," 107–57.

Byzantine practice more in line with the West, at least in terms of marriage impediments among consanguines. This is all the more true considering that this sentiment was contradictory to the matter at hand in the *pittakion*, and certainly relative to the decree of 1166.[93]

It was in 1166 that a synodal decree (σημείωμα συνοδικόν), issued jointly in the names of Patriarch Luke Chrysoberges and Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, finally gave the force of law to the prohibition of marriages between those related to the seventh degree of consanguinity.[94] Yet, this was not the end of all debates surrounding the institution of marriage that held direct relevance for the *genos*. The final decades of the twelfth century saw yet another dispute flare up, this time over the precise nature of the union of husband and wife. While the lengthy debate over the extension of marriage impediments among consanguines amounted to a debate over the limits of the singular *genos* and of "shared blood," this later dispute would determine the church's position on the question of whether a woman became a member of her husband's *genos* at the time of marriage or maintained her membership in her natal *genos*.

In the late twelfth century, yet another a debate erupted among the clergy, this time focused on the calculation of degrees of kinship among affines. This debate centred upon the interpretation of the biblical passage that states that, when a man and a woman entered into a marital union, the two become "one flesh" (μιὰ σάρξ).[95] One party held that a husband and wife should be reckoned at two degrees of kinship, for, if they were regarded as one and the same degree (i.e. literally one flesh), this would result in them having become siblings. Taken one step further, it was argued that all marriages would thus have created an inherently incestuous (and illegal) union. The opposing party, led by the famous canonist Theodore Balsamon, argued that the two spouses became one flesh only in the sense that marriage united their "common human nature," but that this did not mean a complete union of their respective "lineages."[96] Over the course of the debate, neither side argued that the union of man and wife into one flesh amounted to their union into a single *genos*, which is perhaps the strongest argument of all in favour of the *genos* as a descent group that was immune to alterations beyond reproduction, including even the marital union.

Balsamon's opponents apparently held that "his reckoning of husband and wife as a unity might change them into blood relatives, and their marital union into an incestuous relationship."[97] In response, Balsamon found a creative means to defend his position by using the theology of the Trinity, describing the union created by marriage as uniting two individuals in the flesh while each maintained their own, distinct hypostasis (ὑπόστασις),

**93** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 216.

**94** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 95–8; Laiou, "Marriage Prohibitions, Marriage Strategies and the Dowry in Thirteenth-Century Byzantium," 132.

**95** Genesis 2:24; Mark 10: 6–8.

**96** Patrick Viscuso, "Marital Relations in the Theology of the Byzantine Canonist Theodore Balsamon," *Ostkirchliche Studien* 39 (1990), 281–88.

**97** Viscuso, "Marital Relations," 285.

an important innovation in the history of the orthodox theology of marriage.[98] In an effort to deflect inevitable criticism from his opponents, Balsamon lays out his vision of the hypostatic union between husband and wife in such a way that the effect, or lack thereof, that this union would have on each person's respective *genos* is made explicit. He describes each spouse as "those not having the same root (ῥίζαν) and birth/origin (γέννησιν)",[99] language not only suggestive of the maintenance of distinct *genē* by each spouse but also highly reminiscent of the definition of *genos* offered by Nikephoros Blemmydes.[100] At another point in the same text, Balsamon makes his views even clearer. "Each of the *genē* is preserved after the union [i.e. marriage]."[101] Even for Balsamon, who argued passionately for the complete union of husband and wife in one and the same flesh, the *genos* as natal kin group remained unaffected after marriage had taken place.

## Marriage and the *Genos* in the Early Thirteenth Century: Demetrios Chomatenos

Demetrios Chomatenos served as the metropolitan bishop of Ochrid between 1216 and 1236. His *magnum opus* consists of a collection of a large number (152 to be exact) of shorter decisions, letters, and other legal rulings collectively known as *Ponemata Diaphora* (lit. "Various Works").[102] The compilation, which comes close to approximating western European episcopal registers,[103] was probably compiled during the bishop's lifetime and was intended to be used as a teaching tool. This has made it especially attractive to modern scholars.[104] The *Ponemata* are legal rulings or opinions, but their subjects reflect the particular legal purview of a metropolitan bishop in the early thirteenth century. Thus, in addition to cases involving issues specific to the clergy and monastics, much of the corpus deals with family law (broadly defined), especially disputes arising from contested inheritance, the use or alienation of the dowry, divorce, and marriage impediments.[105] The surviving documents produced by Demetrios Chomatenos demonstrate a use and understanding of the *genos* that conforms to the picture developed here, and, coming as it does in the early thirteenth century, that is, at the very end of the period under investigation, it may thus serve as a kind of test case.

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**98** Viscuso, "Marital Relations," 283–84.

**99** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 4, 561.

**100** For a full treatment of this definition, see Chapter 1.

**101** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 4, 558: Τούτου δὲ οὕτως ἔχοντος, καὶ τῶν γενῶν σωζομένων ἑκατέρων μετὰ τὴν ἕνωσιν …

**102** Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, 46.

**103** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 4.

**104** Angeliki Laiou, "Contribution à l'étude de l'institution familiale en Épire au XIIIème siècle," *Fontes Minores* 6 (1984): 275–324.

**105** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 419.

The first item in Demetrios's collection is especially informative for the effect that eleventh- and twelfth-century debates over marriage impediments had on the theoretical underpinnings of the *genos*. *Ponema* 1 is written as a response to a letter of inquiry sent to Chomatenos by one Gregorios Kamonas, who held the title of *sebastos*. Gregorios had previously taken as wife the daughter of a now deceased archon (local magnate) of Arbanos, though their marriage ended in divorce. Gregorios then proceeded to marry a woman bearing the name Komnene, a daughter of the Grand Zhupan of Serbia, Stephan, after her own first husband had died.[106] Komnene's first husband had been the brother of Gregorios's first wife's father, which had led some people to object to Gregorios's second marriage. Chomatenos's lengthy reply amounts to a summary of Byzantine imperial ("secular") and canon law regarding the prohibition of marriage.

Chomatenos summarizes the basics of calculating degrees of kinship found in the *Basilika*, saying that the law "arranges the persons of the *genos* in degrees," thus displaying the tendency for "natural kinship" to be described simply as the *genos*.[107] Demetrios then moves on to subsequent developments in legal and ecclesiastical thought regarding such impediments from the early tenth century to his own day. On the subject of marriage between those related to the seventh degree of consanguinity, which Chomatenos describes as "of the same *genos*," Demetrios tells Kamonas that the "silence of the law" on the matter had previously meant that such marriages were allowed, but it was later deemed "shameful and unseemly" because of the "nearness of the individuals."[108] The space of more than two pages in Prinzing's edition is devoted to the parsing of the words of Basil of Caesarea that sought to establish any marriage that resulted in the "mixing of the names of the *genos*" as incestuous. For Chomatenos, as for many others in the previous two centuries, it was Basil's use of the term "*genos*" on which the matter truly hinged. As Chomatenos assures Kamonas, in marriages between two people related through marriage (ἐξ ἀγχιστείας), there can be no mixing of the names of the *genos*, since there is a distinction between affinity and the *genos*, "or kinship by blood."[109] After several additional paragraphs arguing this point, Chomatenos concludes by telling

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**106** For the significance of her use of the name Komnene in this period, see Ruth Macrides, "What's in the Name 'Megas Komnenos,'" *Ἀρχεῖον Πόντου* 36 (1979), 238–45.

**107** Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, 20: Ἔστι γὰρ οὕτως εἰπεῖν, ὡς ὁ νόμος ἐν τῷ πέμπτῳ τίτλῳ τοῦ κη' βιβλίου τῶν κεκωλυμένων γάμων ποιούμενος ἀπαρίθμησιν καὶ εἰς βαθμοὺς ἀποτάττων τὰ τοῦ γένους πρόσωπα τῶν μὲν ἀνιόντων καὶ κατιόντων τοὺς γάμους ἀόριστον ἔχειν τὴν κωλύμην τεθέσπικε, τοῖς ἐκ πλαγίου δὲ τὸν ἕκτον βαθμὸν κωλυτικὸν ὅριον ἔθετο, ῥητῶς οὕτως εἰπών …

**108** Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, 20: Ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ τὸν ἕβδομον λαχὼν βαθμὸν ἐκ τῆς τοῦ αὐτοῦ γένους σειρᾶς γάμος ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ νόμου σιωπῆς ἔκτοτε ὡς εἰκὸς χώραν λαμβάνων καὶ παρρησιαζόμενος, ὕστερον αἰσχρὸς καὶ ἄσεμνος ἔδοξε διὰ τὴν τῶν προσώπων ἐγγύτητα …

**109** Demetrios Chomatenos, *Ponemata*, 22–23: … ἔνθα δὲ οὐ γένους, ἀλλ'ἐξ ἀγχιστείας προσηγορίαι, οὐδεμία ὑποψία συγχύσεως. Ὅσον δὲ τὸ διάφορον ἀγχιστείας καὶ γένους, ἤγουν συγγενείας ἐξ αἵματος, δῆλον τοῦτο τοῖς εἰδόσι καθέστηκεν. Ο Καμωνᾶς δὲ καὶ ἡ Κομνηνὴ ἐξ ἀγχιστείας ἐλθόντες παρ'ἑκάτερα τοῦ γένους τοῦ Γίνη τῶν τῆς ἀγχιστείας προσηγοριῶν καταχρηστικῶς ἀλλήλοις, ἀλλ'οὐ κυρίως, μετέδωκαν καὶ οὕτως νῦν συναπτόμενοι οὐδαμῶς γένους ὀνομάτων ἐργάζονται σύγχυσιν.

Kamonas that his second marriage was not prohibited by any authority and that it could proceed without impediment.

In this one decision, Demetrios Chomatenos not only summarizes the legal developments concerning marriage impediments from the previous two centuries, in particular the question of the seventh degree of consanguinity, he also demonstrates the use of *genos* as a distinctly and solely natal kin group, he makes explicit the link between the *genos* and shared blood, he plainly understands the *genos* as the kin group within which marriage was prohibited, and he expands upon the Byzantine notion that the *genos* originated with and was governed by nature itself. The *genos* as presented in the writings of Chomatenos is thus entirely consistent with the picture created by his near-contemporary, Nikephoros Blemmydes, in his *Epitome Logica*.[110]

## Conclusion

Marriage was one of the most common ways that a Byzantine individual's *genos* would have directly impacted their lives. In cases of marriage, all people belonged to a *genos*, meaning it was not a social group limited to the aristocracy, at least in some respects. The extension of marriage impediments is perhaps the nearest Byzantium came to an expansion of the family, as described by Kazhdan and Epstein, at least inasmuch as the Byzantine clergy and jurists themselves seem to have understood these extensions as the expansion of the limits of the singular *genos*.[111]

Byzantine law, both canonical and 'secular,' did assign certain "orders" (τάξεις) to affinal relations that were regarded as the equivalent of a consanguineous relative (e.g. "mothers-in-law have the same order as mothers"), which encouraged their treatment as kin in calculations of degrees of kinship for the purpose of, for example, marriage or inheritance. They also enjoyed certain other privileges in people's daily lives that were normally reserved for kin, such as access to the household or shared meals. Still, the evidence overwhelmingly suggests that affinal relations were never considered part of one's *genos*. This was certainly true for those authorities involved in legal issues surrounding marriage.

The surviving decisions analysed here offer strong evidence for the wide variety of authorities informing and supporting the arguments put forward. Eustathios Romaios's decisions draw from both civil, "secular" law and the canons of the church, and the same is true of decisions originating with members of the church hierarchy. Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that it is not simply legal sources, civil or canonical, that appear in such a role in these texts. Equally relevant for bishop and civil judge alike were nearly any written authorities that carried the weight of tradition and were deemed to hold some relevance for the issue at hand.[112] Thus, Eustathios's adaptation of Porphyro-Aristotelian philosophy or his assertion that some knowledge of human physiology was

**110** For more on Blemmydes's significance for the *genos*, see Chapter 1.

**111** Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 100–101.

**112** Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 177.

necessary for a full understanding of kinship was not only acceptable, it was positively unremarkable. Sisinnios's supposed medical expertise can be viewed as bolstering his claim to authority in issues of marriage law in a similar vein.

A careful analysis of the language used by canonists and jurists of the eleventh through early thirteenth centuries shows that, according to these men, the *genos* was the primary form of the family involved in the determination of marriage impediments in the eyes of both secular and canon law. For them, the *genos* was defined as the natural, i.e. consanguineous, family within which marriage was prohibited based, in part, upon the idea that within these limits individuals shared too much of the same "blood." The expansion of prohibitions in the eleventh and early twelfth century was seen, or at least portrayed, as the legal recognition of the limits already put in place by nature itself, rather than purely an innovation on the part of legal thinkers. This expansion was, quite literally, the expansion of the *genos* as legally recognized kin group. Similarly, the debate over the reckoning of degrees separating a man and wife determined that each spouse remained a member of his or her natal *genos* even after they had become "one flesh," effectively maintaining what seems to have been the common opinion for some time previous.

A focus on the use of the term "*genos*" in the legal and theological literature concerning marriage impediments produced in Byzantium shows consistent change between the tenth and early thirteenth centuries that appears as a clear trend. There is a marked, progressive increase in the frequency with which the *genos* appears over this period, in part because the concept came ever more frequently to replace certain other formulations (e.g. "relative by blood" vs. "relative by *genos*"). The *genos* appears much more often in Chomatenos's thirteenth-century decisions than it does in similar documents from even a century earlier. This tendency is reflected in many other sources from the same period, suggesting that the *genos* as kin group was increasing in its social and cultural importance in many spheres of Byzantine society.[113] Over the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the *genos* moved to the centre of the Byzantine concept of kinship and its significance.

Among the many surviving documents related to the debates discussed here, it was not simply the law that was in question. In addition to philosophical precedents, several jurists and clergy throughout the period discussed here referred to medical knowledge of reproduction as relevant to their exploration of the nature and limits of kinship, in particular consanguineous kinship. The preceding pages have made it clear that, following the language of several eleventh-century commentators on marriage law and the reasoning offered by Theodore Balsamon in the late twelfth century, the *genos* as consanguineous kin group only expanded through the reproductive act. The Byzantine *genos* was, in a way, carried in the blood, and the Byzantines, like many western cultures, understood the bond among consanguines to be exactly that: the bond of shared blood. This realization logically leads to the question of just how human reproduction was imagined and the ways in which each parent passed on a part of themselves through

**113** This phenomenon is explored more fully in Chapter 5.

biological reproduction. If marriage impediments among consanguineous kin were understood to be the limits of the singular *genos*, and all those individuals within that *genos* were thought to share a significant portion of the same "blood," how did Byzantine thinkers interpret the significance of "shared blood?" What kinds of traits or characteristics could be passed on from parent(s) to child? What role did medical knowledge play in the composite picture of the *genos* in the tenth through the twelfth century? These are some of the questions addressed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

# INTERROGATING CONSANGUINITY IN A BYZANTINE CONTEXT

> … ἐκ θηλείας τινός … οἱ τούτου [Constantine X] κατήγοντο πρόγονοι, ὅθεν οὐδὲ Δούκας λελόγιστο καθαρός, ἀλλ'ἐπίμικτος καὶ κεκιβδηλευμένην ἔχων τὴν πρὸς τοὺς Δούκας συγγένειαν.
>
> The ancestors of [Constantine X] descended from some female, whence he was not considered a pure Doukas, but as having mixed and adulterated kinship with the Doukai.
>
> John Zonaras, *Epitome Historiarum*, 18.8.12–14

JOHN ZONARAS, THE twelfth-century theologian and author of a history of the world, delivers an aside in his *Epitome of Histories* regarding the family and ancestry of Emperor Constantine X Doukas (r. 1059–1067). In it, Zonaras questions the legitimacy of Constantine's claim to membership in the *genos* of the Doukai.[1] The sentiment is an odd one on its own, as no other surviving source seems to share Zonaras's view of the emperor's descent, but it is made even more so by the reasons Zonaras gives for his critique. He tells his readers that all the male members of the Doukas family were wiped out following the failed revolt of Andronikos and Constantine Doukas in 913.[2] Constantine X was thus related to the tenth-century family through the female line, which is apparently enough to have polluted his bloodline, or at least to have diluted his legitimate claim to membership in the *genos* of Doukas. Though Zonaras's opposition to Alexios I Komnenos, who was married to a member of the Doukas family, is well-documented, and probably helps explain his apparent issues with Constantine X, the method chosen to discredit him appears unusual in a Byzantine context.[3]

Strictly agnatic lines of descent were never a part of Byzantine culture.[4] The classical Roman *familia*, consisting of a male *paterfamilias* who held absolute authority over all of his living descendants through the male line, had effectively disappeared long before the tenth century in Byzantium. Byzantine law always favoured equitable, partible

**1** John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories*, 18.8, lines 12–14.

**2** Zonaras's claim that all male Doukai were killed or castrated after the failed revolts of Andronikos and Constantine would seem to have been inaccurate. According to Skylitzes's narrative, one Nicholas, "the son of Constantine Doukas," was given a military command against the onslaught of Bulgarian tsar Symeon sometime after the death of Emperor Alexander in 913. See Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 204–5, trans. Wortley, 199n44.

**3** *ODB*, 2229.

**4** Laiou, "Family Structure and the Transmission of Property," 51–75, esp. 72.

inheritance practices, including for one's daughters. Family names could be inherited through the female line as often as through the male. At first glance, it appears that Zonaras's comments bear witness to a current within Byzantine thought not generally acknowledged to have existed at all, and one that could have serious implications for how modern scholars understand the intergenerational reproduction of families in a Byzantine context. As anomalous as it may seem, the very fact that Zonaras felt he could attack Constantine X on these grounds assumes that at least some of his readers would have agreed with his assessment that descent through the female line was somehow less legitimate than through the male or that it even had a polluting effect.

Understanding Zonaras's criticism is no easy task, but it is not without potentially fruitful lines of inquiry. In particular, some answers may be sought by approaching the issue through the lens of specifically Byzantine understandings of the process of human reproduction and conception. At first glance, this approach may seem a strange one, but there is some precedent for such studies, especially of medieval and early modern Europe. In fact, Marshall Sahlins has called on scholars working in the fields of anthropology or related disciplines to approach the study of kinship by first accounting for "culturally specific notions of procreation." "For where they are relevant," argues Sahlins, "the blood, milk, semen, bone, flesh, spirit, or whatever of procreation are not simply physiological phenomena, nor do they belong to the parents alone. They are … meaningful social endowments that situate the child in a broadly extended and specifically structured field of kin relationships."[5] Such an approach holds some promise for the study of the Byzantine *genos*, since, as previous chapters have shown, it was a resolutely consanguineous kin group that only reproduced itself through the act of procreation.

Medical knowledge of human reproduction played a surprisingly influential role in Byzantine conceptions of the bond of kinship, especially within the *genos* as the expression of both biological descent and consanguineous kinship. The precise nature of the bond of shared blood, one of the strongest social bonds and the basis of the *genos*, was characterized by a culturally specific understanding of the process of reproduction and the influence this had on the characteristics or traits passed on from each parent to their children. This chapter explores the ways in which Byzantine knowledge of the reproductive process influenced the concept of the *genos*, including the role played by women in its intergenerational reproduction. The precise nature of the bonds uniting individuals within the *genos* were intimately linked with this knowledge.

## The Bond of Shared Blood

The bond of shared blood guaranteed an individual certain rights and privileges, many of them protected by law (e.g. inheritance rights). It also carried with it certain expectations of behaviour and rights of access that existed outside the explicit protection of the law, some of which were shared with other relations or even friends. Mutual political support, the sharing of meals, access to the household, certain inheritance rights, and

**5** Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – and Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 74.

even the expectation of memorialization after death could all be enjoyed by kinsmen of some form or another. Despite the variety of forms of kinship in Byzantium, the bond of shared blood (and thus, of the *genos*) held pride of place as not only the most basic, but also the most indelible and, perhaps, the strongest. In practical terms, affinal relatives could play just as important a role in the social and political advancement of an individual throughout his or her adult life. Yet a relationship "by blood" had certain connotations that went far beyond more pragmatic, political allegiances formed by marriage. A marriage could often be used to cement a political alliance between two families, but this alliance could dissolve in the case of divorce or death. But the birth of a child, in whom the blood of the two families was forever intermingled, lent such alliances an air of permanence and secured their cooperation, or at least mitigated against further hostility, on a much more secure and permanent basis.[6]

This cultural emphasis on the importance of shared descent and shared blood became even more vital in an age when the social standing of one's ancestors was becoming more determinant in the social standing of the living individual. In Niketas Choniates's *History*, Alexios I Komnenos reportedly appealed to the popular belief in the "rights of consanguinity" while defending his choice of his son, John, as successor rather than his son-in-law, Anna Komnene's husband Nikephoros Bryennios. "All the Romans would … conclude that I had lost my senses should I, who gained the throne in an unpraiseworthy manner by denying the rights of consanguinity and the principles of Christian laws, when it came time to leave a succession, replace the child of my loins with the Macedonian [Bryennios]."[7] The trend continued to grow throughout the period covered here.

Consanguineous kinship formed the basis of the multiple forms of adoptive, spiritual, and fictive kinship in Byzantium. The symbolism and language of kinship was utilized in a vast array of relationships in Byzantium, and, in each instance, it was only because of the real and perceived power of what Byzantines called "natural" kinship that such symbolic language held any meaning.[8] Paradoxically, however, the variety of forms in which kinship, broadly defined, appeared throughout the Byzantine Empire's history, has generally attracted modern scholars to the more unusual forms it took.

The previous chapter has shown how several authorities argued for the special importance of kinship by blood over and above that created by marriage or other, legal means in arguments over the recognition of impediments to marriage. This importance appears to have grown over the course of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, despite some modern arguments to the contrary.[9] There is a notable increase over time in the frequency with which authors of various sources indicate whether an individual is a relative of another through marriage (affinity) or "by blood." Terms like

**6** For a similar suggestion, see Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 38.

**7** Choniates, *History*, 6, trans. Magoulias, 5.

**8** See, for example, Dirk Krausmüller, "Byzantine Monastic Communities: Alternative Families?," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 345–58.

**9** Rosemary Morris, "Succession and Usurpation: Politics and Rhetoric in the Late Tenth Century," in *New Constantines: Rhythm of Imperial Renewal in Byzantium, 4th–13th Centuries. Papers from the*

"*homaimon/-os*" (ὁμαίμων) or "*synaimos*" (σύναιμος), literally "of the same blood," appear with much greater frequency than in earlier periods, typically indicating the sibling bond. The proliferation of the term *genos* itself in surviving sources further argues for the added weight given both to lines of descent and to the bond of shared blood.[10] The impression one gets from many sources is not only an increased interest in recording family ties and bonds of kinship in general, but a greater degree of specificity within the umbrella of kinship and the special place held by what the Byzantine sources refer to as "shared blood."[11]

The blood, according to Byzantine reckoning, carried not only the symbolic weight of shared kinship, but also a number of specific characteristics that were understood as being shared amongst blood relatives. The blood was the locus of nobility and other attributes deemed biologically heritable. It carried with it the essence of the individual inasmuch as sharing too much of the same blood prevented marriage.[12] The perceived importance of one's ancestry in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine society extended beyond the symbolic or rhetorical praise of the individual to include a much more literal understanding of the kinds of physical and character traits inherited from one's parents or more distant forebears.

It may seem a matter of course among westerners to speak of consanguineous kinship in terms of shared blood (as the term consanguineous itself attests), but this is not a predetermined trait of all cultures. Even if the Byzantines spoke of this relationship in terms of shared blood, one must still be careful to take into account culturally specific understandings of the method of the reproduction of blood with each new generation. How, according to Byzantine thought, was one or both parents' blood passed on to their children? To what degree did one's offspring share their blood with their mother or father, siblings, or more distant "blood relatives?" What social or cultural significance was attached to this shared blood? The answers to such questions were not always readily apparent.

Though it cannot be said that Byzantine philosophers or physicians had come upon a concept of genetics per se, this does not mean that they did not have an interest in the mechanics of biological reproduction or the heritability of certain traits through the reproductive act. Indeed, whether speaking of the transmission of original sin, a sense of nobility inherited through one's ancestors, or even the breeding of cattle, the Byzantines of the tenth through twelfth centuries had at their disposal a vocabulary for such ideas, which was only partially inherited from earlier thinkers. The *Geoponika* is a good example of this. Compiled in the mid-tenth century, this handbook on farming practices is full of ancient wisdom concerning the breeding of animals and grafting of

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*Twenty-sixth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, St. Andrews, March 1992*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993), 203.

**10** For a detailed analysis of this change, see Chapter 5.

**11** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 467–88.

**12** See the previous chapter for more on this.

plants, much of which includes methods of ensuring certain traits in the offspring, especially sex.[13] Such curiosity and lines of inquiry extended beyond plants and animals to include human reproduction, both in antiquity and in Byzantium.

The application and contribution of medieval Byzantine knowledge of human reproduction to their understanding of the nature of kinship and the full significance of shared blood has not received much scholarly attention. Yet the work of many scholars, working mostly on Western Europe, has shown that heritability was a central concern of philosophers and theologians alike.[14] In particular, the method by which original sin was passed on in each generation, the "othering" of Jews, the ideas underlying nobility by birth, inherited diseases, and even the more mundane processes of animal breeding and plant grafting were all issues that concerned medieval thinkers, and, in many cases, they were approached using a common body of authoritative texts and a similar set of questions and assumptions.

Steven Epstein has published an entire monograph focused on (western) medieval ideas about biologically inherited traits among all living things, including human beings, and the ways in which this knowledge was used, especially in the spheres of animal breeding and plant grafting.[15] In his work, Epstein demonstrates that "inheritability was well understood in surprising ways by many medieval people, from scholars in their lofty perches in the great universities to farmers in the most remote countryside."[16] This knowledge was used for more practical, agricultural purposes, but it also played a role in more theoretical discussions, including those surrounding the process of human reproduction.

Epstein highlights the repeated emphasis found in his sources that, in nature, "like produces like."[17] Western Europeans regarded truisms like this, which were typically found in discussions of plants or animals, as equally true for human beings. "Nevertheless, [medieval European] people observed that their children were a mixture of parental qualities … 'Like produces like' did not mean identical, and so there was always room and a need, to explain slight changes in appearance over time …"[18] According to Epstein, the translation and dissemination of Aristotle's *On the Generation of Animals* radically changed European thought on reproduction and, especially, inheritability of traits after the mid-thirteenth century.[19] In Byzantium, neither Galen nor Aristotle were ever lost, and the ideas that they encouraged regarding the relationship between biological reproduction and human character remained influential.

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**13** *Geoponika* 9, ed. and trans. Andrew Dalby, *Geoponika: Farm Work* (Malta: Prospect Books, 2011).

**14** For a good introduction to the topic, see Maaike van der Lugt and Charles Miramon, eds., *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et Époque moderne* (Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2008).

**15** Steven A. Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

**16** Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, 7.

**17** Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, passim (see esp. 78–112).

**18** Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, 83.

**19** Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, 96ff.

Other scholars have similarly examined medieval ideas of physiology and inheritability to explore wider meanings of human relationships. Joan Cadden's work has shown that an analysis of medieval medical knowledge and ideas surrounding human reproduction can be used to offer a fresh analysis of the role of women in medieval society.[20] Peter Brown's pioneering work on sexual renunciation in early Christianity draws heavily on Greco-Roman and Late Antique ideas about sexual reproduction and the relationship between the individual and his/her body.[21] Peter Biller has argued that Christian ideas about human multiplication and population control played a role in determining which foreign enemies were most threatening to Christian Europe, in particular by examining medieval thought on marriage.[22]

There is a long history of scholarship on the development of ideals of nobility "by blood" in Western Europe, even if much of this has largely ignored the role of medical knowledge in the development of such ideas.[23] In the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Spanish Empire, blood was deemed to carry not only physical, but also cultural traits. This has close parallels in the medieval Byzantine evidence. Spanish ideas of *limpieza de sangre* and of the negative connotations associated with the term "race" (*raza*) were, in fact, informed by both medical knowledge and by practices associated with the breeding of domesticated animals.[24] One might compare this to Aristotle, who also uses horses alongside human beings to illustrate his ideas about the *genos*, and to Galenic thought, in which humans, animals, and even plants are seen as differing (at least physiologically and reproductively) only in degree (of wetness/dryness, warmth/cold, etc.).[25]

Recent studies have observed a high level of interdisciplinarity in medieval thought regarding heritability.[26] Western medieval thought on hereditary diseases borrowed heavily from existing legal tracts, while the concept of latency in hereditary diseases

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**20** Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*.

**21** Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

**22** Peter Biller, *The Measure of Multitude: Population in Medieval Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, 5.

**23** The historiography for this issue is extensive and covers more than a century. For a good overview, see Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*; David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France, 900–1300* (London: Pearson Longman, 2005); Timothy Reuter, ed., *The Medieval Nobility: Studies on the Ruling Classes of France and Germany from the Sixth to Twelfth Century* (Oxford: North-Holland, 1978).

**24** Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *The Origins of Racism in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

**25** Humanity was, it must be admitted, treated as something fundamentally different from the rest of creation, inasmuch as human beings were understood to have souls. For numerous reasons, this chapter is not primarily concerned with the medieval Byzantine theology of the soul or the inheritance of original sin. See Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*, 86–95.

**26** See, for example, van der Lugt and Miramon, *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et Époque modern*.

depended to a large extent on similar ideas in theology.[27] The same interdisciplinary nature is exhibited in the medieval Byzantine context.

## Galen and Medical Knowledge in Discussions of Kinship

Any discussion of Byzantine knowledge of human reproduction should begin with Galen. The late Roman physician's enormous body of work formed the foundation of Byzantine medical knowledge.[28] Galen thought that both men and women produced semen, though the male's was considered to be more perfect. Following Galen's model, the male and female semen, when combined in the uterus, competed for prevalence in various portions of the new foetus. In certain areas, the male's semen would prevail, while, in others, the female's became dominant. Thus, the offspring resembled his/her father in some aspects, the mother in others.[29] This contrasts with the Aristotelian version, which was the predominant model of reproduction in the medieval West.[30] For Aristotle, the male alone contributed semen, while the female offered only nutriment for the foetus. In short, the male was entirely responsible for the child's form.[31]

This is not to say that Galen envisioned a perfect equality between the sexes. Even if he contended that women contributed their own seed to the foetus, he certainly did not view women themselves as the equals of their male counterparts.[32] So, for example, he states, "Now just as mankind is the most perfect of all animals, so within mankind the man is more perfect than the woman, and the reason for his perfection is his excess of heat, for heat is Nature's primary instrument."[33] This "heat" was vital to Galen's vision of the natural world, as it was simply a difference in the level of this heat that differentiated motile animals (including humans) from plants. The reason women are imperfect, he argues, is so that the foetus can draw nutrients from her; if she were perfect, she would use all of it herself. "This is the reason why the female was made cold, and the immediate consequence of this is the imperfection of the parts, which cannot emerge on the outside

**27** Michel Morange, Review of *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et Époque moderne: Perspectives historiques*, *The Cambridge Journal of Medical History* 55 (2011): 256–57.

**28** Owsei Temkin, "Byzantine Medicine: Tradition and Empiricism," *DOP* 16 (1962): 95–116.

**29** Jan Blayney, "Theories of Conception in the Ancient Roman World," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 230–36.

**30** Aristotle's views were, in fact, a good deal more complicated than this. For a more nuanced view, see Leland Giovannelli, "Aristotle's Theory of Sexual Reproduction as it Emerges in *On the Generation of Animals*," PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1999.

**31** Blayney, "Theories of Conception in the Ancient Roman World," 234.

**32** For a more complete treatment of gender differences in Galen and other Roman medical traditions, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*; Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

**33** Galen, *De usu partium*, vol. 4, 161, trans. Margaret Tallmadge May, *Galen: On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 630.

on account of the defect in the heat, another very great advantage for the continuance of the race (γένους)."[34]

Galen's vision of nature (φύσις), which had a strong influence on the Byzantine concept of "natural kinship," allowed for a certain degree of analysis and understanding by human subjects. As one scholar puts it, Galen "saw the bodies of living things as works of art, put together by an intelligent nature with a purpose in mind."[35] Unlike the Christian God, however, Galen's nature "must operate according to the ordinary laws of cause and effect, and use whatever material is available."[36] This made nature comprehensible to scientific inquiry, a foundational notion of Galen's school of medicine and philosophy. This fact had important implications for the *genos*, understood as it was as "natural kinship," and opened the door to medieval Byzantine authors who wished to interrogate the nature of heritability in human beings.

The *genos* was unambiguously imagined as a natal kin group, with its members linked through shared bonds of common descent and expressed in the sources as "natural kinship." "*Genos*" was also frequently used, from at least the early eleventh century, as a substitute or synonym of "blood" when sources speak of consanguineous kinship. It should thus be clear that the bonds linking individuals of the same *genos* were imagined as that based upon the sharing of blood.

A careful reading of the sources brings to light the surprising influence medical and physiological knowledge, especially the Galenic corpus, had on the theoretical underpinnings and cultural norms associated with the *genos*.[37] Byzantines regarded Galen as a philosopher as much as a medical professional, and thus a much broader range of individuals were familiar with his works. Michael Psellos is known to have addressed issues of human reproduction in his voluminous writings.[38] The anonymous author of *Timarion*, a fictional narrative produced in the twelfth century, clearly assumes that its readers will have a remarkably thorough knowledge of Greco-Roman medical writers.[39]

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**34** Galen, *De usu partium*, vol. 4, 163, trans. Tallmadge May, 630–31. See also Chapter 5.

**35** Peter Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting: A Study of the Origins, Development, and Validity of his Opinions, with a Translation of the Three Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

**36** Brain, *Galen on Bloodletting*, 4.

**37** The use of medical language and metaphors in the theological writing of medieval Byzantium has come to the attention of scholars in the past. See Spyros Troianos, "Γιατρική επιστήμη και γιατροί στο ερμηνευτικό έργο των κανονολόγων του 12ου αιώνα," in *Byzantium in the 12th Century: Canon Law, State and Society/Το Βυζάντιο κατά τον 12ο αιώνα, Κανονικό Δίκαιο, κράτος και κοινωνία*, ed. Nicolas Oikonomidès (Athens: Society of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Studies, 1991), 465–82.

**38** Michael Psellos's *De omnifaria doctrina* (also known as *Concise Answers to Various Questions*) includes several, short explications, including "How Different Types of Conception Occur" (no. 110), "How Male and Female are Born" (no. 111), and "How Do Children Become Similar and Dissimilar to their Parents" (no. 114). See Michael Psellos, *De omnifaria doctrina*, ed. L. G. Westerink (Utrecht: J. L. Beijers, 1948).

**39** *Timarion*, ed. Roberto Romano (Naples: Università di Napoli, 1974). The relatively short work relies on the reader's pre-existing knowledge of Greco-Roman medicine and medical writers.

Theodore Balsamon, the twelfth-century bishop of Antioch, also clearly displays a knowledge of medical treatises in his canonical writing.[40] A near-contemporary letter written by Michael Italikos has important implications for the relationship between the *genos*, blood, and human reproduction, as we shall see below. Italikos, it should be remembered, was named *didaskalos* of (medical) doctors, and several letters attest to his extensive medical knowledge.[41]

Eustathios Romaios makes several allusions to medical knowledge in his discussions and decisions regarding marriage impediments, many of them appearing in the eleventh-century debate over the seventh degree of consanguinity. In one discussion contained in the *Peira*, the jurist describes the nature of kinship and makes the connection between medical science and legal kinship explicit. "Thus, their [the husband and wife's] seeds become the origin of legal kinship … I blush that the law has taught me not to measure the degrees of collateral kinsmen before I learn the cause of birth, and from this I will unify the separate saplings back into one as though through a single root."[42] The language Eustathios chooses in the passage is especially informative. The phrase "the origin of legal kinship" (τῆς νομίμης ἀρχὴ γίνονται συγγενείας) closely parallels the language used by Aristotle in his work, *On the Generation of Animals*. Aristotle speaks of male and female as "the origin" or "first principle of generation" (τὸ θῆλυ καὶ τὸ ἄρρεν ἀρχαὶ τῆς γενέσεώς εἰσιν).[43] Elsewhere, Eustathios employs the phrase "the cause of birth" (τῷ αἰτίῳ τῆς γεννήσεως), which is similar to language found throughout Galen's discussions of reproduction and the formation of the foetus.[44] Eustathios might express embarrassment at the prospect of providing the reader with details regarding biological reproduction, a subject about which he claims a certain amount of ignorance, yet, in his own words, such knowledge was necessary in order fully to understand the reasons behind the Byzantine legal definition of kinship and the limits imposed on consanguineous marriage. Even the Tome of Sisinnios, the most influential of documents concerning marriage impediments, opens with a medical metaphor in which the work of doctors of the body (i.e. physicians) is compared with that of a "doctor of souls."[45] Patriarch Sisinnios was known for his knowledge not only of the law, but also of medicine.

Michael Skribas, author of a short work in opposition to the Tome of Sisinnios, equally utilizes the language and knowledge of human reproduction in his criticism. He draws

**40** Patrick Viscuso, "Theodore Balsamon's Canonical Images of Women," *GRBS* 45 (2005): 317–26.

**41** *ODB*, 1328.

**42** Eustathios Romaios, *Peira*, 62.2: ὧν τοίνυν τὰ σπέρματα τῆς νομίμης ἀρχὴ γίνονται συγγενείας … ἐρυθριῶ γὰρ τὸν νόμον διδάσκοντά με μὴ ἄλλως τῶν ἐκ πλαγίου συγγενῶν τοὺς βαθμοὺς μετρεῖν, πρὶν ἐπιστῶ **τῷ αἰτίῳ τῆς γεννήσεως**, κάκ τούτου πρὸς ἑαυτὸν τοὺς ἀποδιεστῶτας ἑνώσω κλάδους ὥσπερ διὰ μιᾶς ῥίζης. Bold added.

**43** Aristotle, *De generatione animalium*, 1.2, ed. H. J. Drossaart Lulofs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, reprint 1972), 716a.

**44** Galen, *De usu partium*, vol. 3, 757, line 18 (αἰτία τῆς γενέσεως); vol. 4, 183, lines 12–13 (ἀρχὴ γίγνεται ζῴου γενέσεως), and 183, lines 15–16 (ἡ δ'αἰτία καὶ τῆς τούτου γενέσεως ἥδε).

**45** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, vol. 5, 11. The term used is "ψυχῶν ἰατρὸς."

upon "medical and philosophical knowledge" (κατὰ τοὺς ἰατρικοὺς ἤτοι ἐμφιλοσόφους νόμους) to defend his positions, in this case regarding the "natural" hierarchy of social order within the consanguineous family. In this same passage, Skribas uses the phrase "the cause of birth" (τὸ αἴτιον τῆς γεννήσεως) to refer to the genitor, who is contrasted with the one "birthed" (i.e. parents vs. children).[46] Once again, the language is strongly reminiscent of that found in both Galen's and Aristotle's visions of human reproduction.

Nor was it only in the law that medical knowledge was deemed useful for a fuller understanding of the nature of kinship. One of the many surviving letters of Michael Psellos is addressed to the nephews of Patriarch Michael Keroularios, almost certainly the brothers Constantine and Nikephoros.[47] It is given the title "On Friendship" (Περὶ φιλίας), but Psellos dwells for some time on the unique strength and nature of the sibling bond. The letter is predictably full of rhetorical *topoi* and metaphors for kinship that one finds in a large number of orations, poems, and even legal opinions. Where Psellos's letter becomes interesting, however, is the sizeable section in which he effectively summarizes Galen's treatise on the formation of foetuses. It forms a part of a longer rhetorical treatment of the nature of the sibling bond as something unique precisely because of the siblings' identical origins, sharing the same parents and having occupied the same womb. Psellos follows the principal that two or more things created from the same source share a similar disposition.[48]

After a typical, rhetorical introduction, Psellos quickly enters into a discussion of the nature of friendship and kinship (especially the bond of brotherhood) and the links between the two (ἀδελφικὴ φιλία, literally "brotherly love").[49] He marvels at the favour and friendship the brothers have shown him, despite the fact that he is not a relative of theirs.[50] Psellos dwells for some time on the good example set by Nikephoros and Constantine's father and his relationship with their uncle, the patriarch. While some siblings find themselves at odds, "contravening nature," Nikephoros and Constantine are praiseworthy for living their adult lives as they had begun it, interconnected and harmonious.[51]

Psellos launches into a typically philosophical exposition of the shared nature of brothers, sharing as they do "the same root."[52] The closeness of siblings, he argues, begins in the womb. As a result, Psellos sees fit to describe the process that leads to the creation of children in his exposition of the sibling bond. He tells his addressees that,

**46** Schminck, "Kritik am Tomos," 224.31–7: καὶ κατὰ τοὺς ἰατρικοὺς ἤτοι ἐμφιλοσόφους νόμους, οἵ φασι μὴ ὅσιον εἶναι τὸ αἴτιον τῆς γεννήσεως ὑποβαίνειν τῷ γεννωμένῳ …

**47** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 513–23; Kenneth Snipes, "A Letter of Michael Psellus to Constantine the Nephew of Michael Cerularius," *GRBS* 22 (1981): 89–107.

**48** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 516–17.

**49** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 514.

**50** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 513–14.

**51** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 517–18.

**52** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 515: καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ τὴν ὑμετέραν ἀγαθὴν συμφυΐαν ὀμόθεν ἐκ τῆς αὐτῆς ῥίζης ἀναβλαστήσασαν …

if they'd like to know something about the nature of the origin of siblings, he'll oblige them.[53] What follows is brief account of the process of human reproduction that draws heavily from Galen's vision of the formation of the foetus.[54] Psellos closes the section by claiming that he had "thus revealed the entire mystery of our birth."[55] In good rhetorical fashion, he gives several additional appellations for this mystery, including the "combination of the *genē*" (γενῶν συνάφεια) and the "mingling of the *genē*" (γενῶν ἀνάκρασις).

Michael Psellos and Eustathios Romaios viewed the knowledge of the process by which conception occurs and the foetus is formed as indispensable in a deeper understanding of the true nature of the bond of kinship. For Eustathios and Michael Skribas, such knowledge was equally necessary to fully grasp the mechanics and theory underlying legal impediments to marriage based upon consanguinity. These authors sought an understanding of the nature and limits of shared blood not simply as an academic or rhetorical exercise. For them, consanguineous kinship, and even kinship in general, could not be understood without recourse to physiology and the workings not just of God, but also of nature. Galenic medicine was not only widely read and discussed in tenth- through twelfth-century Byzantium, it was central to discussions surrounding numerous aspects of kinship and marriage.

## Extent and Degrees of Shared Blood

Eustathios Romaios's remarks in his *hypomnema* of 1025, in which he argues that the essence of the individual carried in the blood decreased with each successive degree of kinship separating two individuals, suggest that the limits of the family as expressed in marriage impediments was also understood as the limits of shared blood.[56] Eustathios's

**53** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 517: Εἰ βούλεσθε βραχύ τι τὴν γένεσιν ὑμῖν **φυσιολογήσω** τῆς φύσεως, ἵν'εἰδῆτε ἑκ ποίας ἐνώσεως οἱ πολλοί τῶν ἀδελφῶν διεστήκασι. (Bold added.) It is noteworthy that Psellos introduces his description with the verb φυσιολογε ῖν, quite literally recalling the field of physiology.

**54** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 517: σπέρμα πατρόθεν φερόμενον, καὶ παρὰ τῆς πρώτης ἠμῶν καὶ μετρῴας θηλῆς αἱματηρὸς καταχέων χυμὸς ὥς περ εἴς τι κοῖλον χωρίον τὸ τελευταῖον κύτος τοῦ μητρικοῦ σώματος, καὶ ἀλλήλω συμβεβηκότε, δημιουργεῖτον κοινῇ τὰ γεννώμενα· εἶτα τὸ σύμπαν γονούμενον καὶ θρομβούμενον καὶ οἷον σπαιρούμενον, ἀρτήματί τινι, χορίῳ οὕτω λεγομένῳ, τῇ βάσει προσῆπται τοῦ περιέχοντος, ἐτέρῳ τινὶ ἀγγείῳ ἑκ τῆς ὁμφ αλιτιδος διατεινομένῳ μεσότητος, ταῖς κοτυληδοῦσι τῆς μήτρας διαπλάττεται· εἶτα δὴ ῥαγέντος τοῦ ἐπιπάγου, καὶ τῶν ὀργάνων ὑγρῶς τὰ πρῶτα συμμορφουμένων, δυσὶν ὑμέσι λεπτοῖς ὀρᾶται περιεχόμενον τὸ τικτόμενον, ἵνα τὴν ἁρμονίαν ἡ φύσις φυλάξῃ τοῖς μέλεσι καὶ μὴ διαχυθῇ τὰ ὄργανα ταῖς ὑγρότησιν, ἀλλὰ συμφύηται ταῖς ἐνότησι. Cf. Galen, *On the Formation of the Foetus* (Greek title: Περὶ κυουμένων διαπλάσεως).

**55** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 517: Τὸ σύμπαν οὖν μυστήριον τῆς ἠμετέρας γενέσεως, ἐνότης λόγου ἐστί, γενῶν συνάφεια, γενῶν ἀνάκρασις, διάπλασις σώματος, καὶ τὸ παρὰ τοῦ παντὸς γένους ἀπαιτούμενον τῆς κοινωνίας καὶ τῆς ὁμοφροσύνης ὄφλημα.

**56** Eustathios expressed the opinion that marriage between third cousins did not produce a "mingling of the blood." See Burgmann, "Turning Sisinnios against the Sisinnians," 170.

writings strongly suggest that the bonds of shared blood were thought to be stronger among parents and children and siblings than among more distant relatives. Not all kinsmen, even kinsmen "by blood," were thought to share their blood to the same extent. This is supported by the use of "*homaimon*" among many Byzantines, who tend to use the term solely for siblings, having as they did the same set of parents and earlier progenitors.

Letter thirty-five in Michael Italikos's surviving collection suggests that the extent to which kinsmen shared the same blood was an active area of inquiry in the mid-twelfth century.[57] Italikos composed the letter in response to a specific request by one Alexios Komnenos, who sought some clarification about the origin and use of several Greek terms designating some form of kinship. Specifically, Alexios wished to learn more about the term "*homaimon*."

Upon reading Italikos's letter, it quickly becomes clear that he took great issue with the tendency for his contemporaries to utilize the term "*homaimon*" (and "*synaimos*") to refer only to siblings. The extent of his annoyance is manifest in the opening lines of the letter. "Those who argue that the expression '*homaimon*' is only for siblings, just as others argue for '*homognios*,' seem to me to be novices in the Hellenic dialect."[58] "Some unlearned people ascribe the term '*homaimon*' to [their] brother."[59] Italikos could hardly be clearer. He goes on to cite several examples from classical Greek literature to support his own conclusion, which he expresses as the following: "Hence all [ancient] Greeks called '*homaimoi*' not just brothers, but indeed [all] kinsmen, since they share in the same blood … the term '*homaimos*' extends to the entire *genos* … And so that I might express to you more generally, those relatives called ascendants, descendants, and collateral [kin] will all be termed '*homaimoi*.' "[60]

Italikos' categorization of consanguineous kin suggests some familiarity with Byzantine marriage law, while his arguments taken as a whole obviously support the correlation between the *genos* and the "natural kinship" of Byzantine legal sources. He makes the argument that "those of the same blood" should extend to the entire *genos*, even if many of his contemporaries disagreed. Hearkening back once again to Byzantine marriage law, his contemporaries' disagreement may perhaps have stemmed from an understanding of "shared blood" that included the concept of diminishing likeness as one moves outward in degrees of kinship.[61]

Eleventh- and twelfth-century sources are full of uses of both "*homaimon*" and "*synaimos*" that support the conclusion that these terms were being employed solely to

**57** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep*. 35.

**58** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep*. 35, 215.1: Οἱ τὴν «ὁμαίμων» φωνὴν εἰς ἀδελφοὺς καὶ μόνον ἐκβιαζόμενοι, καθάπερ καὶ τὴν «ὁμόγνιος» ἕτεροι, δοκοῦσί μοι νεοτελεῖς εἶναι ταῖς Ἑλληνικαῖς δι αλέκτοις.

**59** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep*. 35, 216.6–7: τὴν «ὁμαίμονος» λέξιν τε καὶ φωνὴν ἁμαθῶς τινες εἰς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἐκλαμβάνονται.

**60** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep*. 35, 217.1–4: Ἔνθεν τοι καὶ «ὁμαίμους» καλοῦσιν Ἕλληνες ἅπαντες οὐ τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς συγγενεῖς, ὡς τοῦ αὐτοῦ κεκοινωνηκότας αἵματος.

**61** See Chapter 3.

indicate siblings (most often brothers).[62] Despite Italikos' protests, the evidence suggests that many of his contemporaries understood blood to be shared amongst relatives (i.e. within the *genos*) according to degrees that decreased as relatives became more distant. In fact, this very idea, which was so influential in debates over marriage impediments, was expressed as early as Aristotle. Aristotle argued that brothers love each other "by virtue of their having grown from the same sources" and that the bond between all blood relatives derived from this first bond between parents and children and siblings, even if "some of these [relatives] belong more closely while others are more distant, depending on whether the ancestral common sources are near or further off."[63] It is not difficult to see the influence of these ideas on the thought of Michael Psellos or even on eleventh-century arguments about marriage impediments among consanguineous kin.[64]

One extant version of a *novella* issued by Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos offers a rare glimpse into these kinds of discussions (and misunderstandings) of the "mixing of blood."[65] Initially issued in either 922 or 928, the *novella* was concerned primarily with the right of pre-emption (προτίμησις), the right of certain individuals to purchase a given property before it is offered to the general public.[66] One of the cornerstones of this piece of legislation was the right of kinsmen (συγγενεῖς) who owned property immediately adjacent to or "combined with" the property to be sold. This latter concept is expressed in the legislation, literally, as "those kinsmen [who are] intermingled (ἀναμὶξ συγκειμένους συγγενεῖς)."[67] What makes this particular version of the novella so interesting is the short commentary that follows this declaration. Romanos I (or a later copyist) felt the need to explain the concept of "intermingled kinsmen," apparently because of a certain degree of confusion. The reader is told that these "intermingled kinsmen" are simply those relatives who jointly own a plot of land or other property with the seller in question, and not, as "some fools" would have you believe, those kinsmen with whom the seller's blood is somehow "mixed."[68]

> For who, having learned his letters and familiar with our dialect [could have] the idea … that those who are called 'intertwined' or 'intermingled' are kinsmen through the mixing of the blood? For every person has his own blood, and the kinsman is not said to intermingle his blood (ἀναμιγῇ τὸ αἷμα) with [that of] his kinsman. Would that a Christian would not have received [the idea] to intermingle

**62** *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 141 (*synaimos*).

**63** *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 141 (*synaimos*).

**64** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. I. Bywater, *Aristotelis ethica Nicomachea* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894, reprint 1962), 8.1161a–1162b, trans. Christopher Rowe, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

**65** This version is found in the MS Cod. Paris. Gr. 1355. It has been edited and published as an appendix by Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 178–81.

**66** McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 37–48.

**67** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 178: "… ὸ πωλῶν ὀφείλει προσκαλεῖσθαι είς τὴν τούτου ἀγορὰν πρῶτον τοὺς ἀναμὶξ συγκειμένους συγγενεῖς."

**68** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 178.

> his blood with the blood of his kinsman. For those who do this are called 'blood-mixers' (αἱμομίκται) [i.e. incestuous] and it is forbidden. For an unrelated man and his unrelated wife intermingle (Ἀναμιγνύουσι) their blood. These, then are [relatives] of the first degree.[69]

Romanos I (or the copyist) was clearly reacting to a trend that extended beyond one or two isolated cases. Reading Lekapenos's *novella* and Italikos's letter side-by-side, it appears that there was a consistent current among some Byzantine thinkers who experienced frustration at the ways in which "blood" was being imagined and used by at least some part of contemporary society. There was genuine interest in, and sometimes frustration with, concepts of the mixing of blood amongst kin and the degree to which blood was shared among relatives.

## Traits Passed on through Blood

If degrees of shared blood and methods of understanding descent were so important to Byzantine writers of the tenth through twelfth centuries, what kinds of traits or characteristics were viewed as in-born or shared amongst those who shared the same or similar blood? This approach, too, has been suggested by Sahlins, who argues that not only can different societies assign radically different roles to the parental contribution in procreation, these radical differences can include variable understandings and even the conflation of "the child's inner being or outward appearance."[70] This observation is broadly consistent with analyses of the concept of nobility and purity of blood in medieval and early modern Europe, as well as with the medieval Byzantine evidence, which displays a consistent conflation, or at least lack of differentiation, of character or phenotypical traits with cultural, religious, and ethnic ones. While it would be impossible to piece together a comprehensive picture of the traits considered to be inheritable among Byzantine thinkers, a perusal of surviving Byzantine sources does reveal some common tendencies and is not without merit.

The Byzantines certainly recognized that children often resembled their parents, and this is reflected both in their written works and in art. There was, after all, a long history of using apparent "family resemblances" in Roman imperial portraiture to visually reinforce claims to legitimacy by associating the new emperor's features with those of his predecessor, even if the two of them had no biological relation.[71] Theories about the

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**69** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 179: … Τίς γάρ ποτε γράμματα μαθὼν καὶ τῆς ἠμετέρας διαλέκτου γινώσκων τὴν ἔννοιαν … ὅτι συμπεπλεγμένους ἐκάλεσεν ἢ ἀναμεμιγμένους τοὺς συγγενεῖς διὰ τὴν ἀναμιγὴν τοῦ αἵματος; Πᾶς γὰρ ἄνθρωπος ἴδιον αἷμα ἔχει, καὶ ὁ συγγενὴς πρὸς τὸν συγγενῆν οὐ λέγεται ἔχειν ἀναμεμιγμένον αἷμα. Εἴθε δὲ μηδὲ καταδέξηται χριστιανὸς ἵνα ἀναμιγῇ τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ μετὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ συγγενοῦς αὐτοῦ. Τοῦτο γὰρ οἱ ποιοῦντες καὶ αἱμομίκται εἰσὶ καὶ κολάζονται. Ἀναμιγνύουσι δὲ αἵματα αὐτῶν ὁ ξένος ἀνὴρ πρὸς ξένην κόρην. Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν εἰσὶ τὰ τοῦ πρώτου βαθμοῦ.

**70** Sahlins, *What Kinship Is – and Is Not*, 86–87.

**71** James D. Breckenridge, *Likeness: A Conceptual History of Ancient Portraiture* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Diana E. E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

resemblance of children to their parents had an equally long history in Greek, Roman, and Byzantine literature, especially philosophy. Aristotle thought that "parents love children as being themselves" because "those sprung from them are as it were other selves of theirs."[72] A similar sentiment is repeated by Kekaumenos in the late eleventh-century, who tells his sons that "a man pretending to extol you, but condemning your father, dishonours you. For a lion gives birth to a lion, and a fox births a fox."[73]

Byzantine sources reveal a number of traits, both behavioural and physical, that were deemed heritable from one's parents or ancestors. The same letter written by Psellos to the nephews of Patriarch Michael Keroularios (described above) contains a short list of physical traits that Psellos describes as typically shared by siblings. He lists the eyes, nose, brow, "and such things even unto their hands and feet" as outward indicators of their shared nature (ἐνὸς φύσεως).[74] For Psellos, these physical traits act as reminders that those sharing the same parents also share similarities in their character and even their souls.

In his encomium for his mother, Psellos offers a description of his sister that includes how nature "modeled my sister on the image of my mother so that she might have, even if the prototype were lost, a faithful likeness."[75] Such imagery, especially the idea of a child as the "image" or "likeness" of his/her parent, had long history in the Greco-Roman tradition. In his *Chronographia*, Psellos tells his readers that "According to the historians, this man Bardas [Phokas] reminded people of his uncle, the Emperor Nicephorus, for he was always wrapped in gloom, and watchful, capable of foreseeing all eventualities, of comprehending everything at a glance …"[76] Elsewhere in the text, one learns that the *Doux* John Komnenos "inherited courageous spirit from a long line of ancestors."[77]

When Michael Attaleiates asserted that Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078–1081) was a descendant of the *genos* of Phokas, he supported his claim by citing a personal experience he had on the island of Crete, which had been re-conquered by the future emperor Nikephoros Phokas in 961. "When I visited the island [Crete], I saw the image myself [of Nikephoros II Phokas in the Church of the Theotokos of the Magistros], which in all ways resembles the aforementioned emperor, the lord Nikephoros Botaneiates, perfect proof that he is in fact the descendant of that man."[78] This same anxiety to authenticate his claims appears later in the same book, when Attaleiates includes a reference to "an old book" that he had viewed in the construction of his genealogy of Botaneiates

**72** Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.1161a–1162b.

**73** Kekaumenos, 128: ὁ ὑποκρινόμενος ἐκθειάζειν σε, ψέγων δὲ τὸν πατέρα σου, σὲ αὐτὸν ἀτιμάζει· ὁ γὰρ λέων λέοντα γεννᾷ καὶ ἡ ἀλώπηξ ἀλώπεκα.

**74** Michael Psellos, *Letters*, *Ep*. 108, ed. E. Kurtz and F. Drexl, *Michaelis Pselli Scripta Minora*, vol. 2 (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1941); Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 516.

**75** Anthony Kaldellis, trans., *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters: The Byzantine Family of Michael Psellos* (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 58 (4c in the encomium).

**76** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1.7, trans. Sewter, 31.

**77** Psellos, *Chronographia* 7.22, trans. Sewter, 288.

**78** Attaleiates, *History*, 28.7, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 416–17.

and the Phokades.[79] Significantly, Attaleiates thought that the physical resemblance of Botaneiates to the image of Phokas would be enough to support his claim and quiet those who might doubt him.

Anna Komnene displays a constant concern to describe the family and ancestry of many of the individuals that appear in her *Alexiad*. So, for instance, she describes Bohemond, the Norman prince of Antioch, as "resembl[ing] his father in all respects, in daring, strength, and aristocratic and indomitable spirit. In short, Bohemond was the exact replica and living image of his father."[80] Much later in her narrative, Anna has another Latin noble point out how Bohemond had inherited "perjury and guile from [his] ancestors."[81]

Anna even describes her own ancestry, however briefly, in the text. When speaking of her parents, Alexios and Eirene, Anna describes how "a baby girl was born to them, who resembled her father, so they said, in all respects." At another point, Anna describes Isaac Komnenos, Alexios I's brother, as "in word and deed a true aristocrat, in many ways recalling my own father."[82] Speaking of the gout her father suffered later in life, Anna tries to understand its underlying causes. "This malady had afflicted none of his ancestors, so that it was certainly not an inherited disease."[83] The members of the imperial dynasty of the Komnenoi themselves were known for their swarthy skin colour, something that is perhaps attested in some surviving portraits.[84]

The heritable trait that has received the most attention from modern scholars is, of course, "nobility" (εὐγένεια). The idea of nobility by birth (or "by blood") was not an invention of the tenth or eleventh century, even if it does appear in the sources with much greater frequency at this time, especially after the 1040s and 1050s.[85] The Byzantine concept of nobility is difficult to define, and even in the eleventh or twelfth century, nobility could be as much about personal comportment or individual action as it was about illustrious descent, sometimes even in works by the same author.[86] For the purposes of this chapter, it is enough to point out that nobility was not only understood to be inherited from one's parents or ancestors, it was literally carried "in the

**79** For more on this, see Chapter 5. See also Nathan Leidholm, "Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii: Embellished Genealogies and Contested Kinship in Eleventh-Century Byzantium," *BMGS* 42 (2018): 185–201.

**80** Anna Komnene, *Alexiad*, 1.14, ed. Diether R. Reinsch and Athanasios Kambylis (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), trans. E. R. A. Sewter, *Anna Comnena: The Alexiad* (London: Penguin, 1969), 66.

**81** Komnene, *Alexiad* 10.11, trans. Sewter, 330.

**82** *Alexiad* 2.1, trans. Sewter, 74.

**83** *Alexiad* 14.4, trans. Sewter, 449.

**84** See MS Vat. Gr. 1176, in which Manuel Komnenos is pictured next to Maria of Antioch. Manuel appears noticeably darker than Maria. The image is reproduced on the front cover of Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

**85** See Vlysidou, *Αριστοκρατικές οικογένειες καί εξουσία*, 25.

**86** Attaleiates, for example, praises Nikephoros Botaneiates's supposed ancestors for the noble deeds, which, he claims, were the natural result of their in-born nobility. "Nonetheless, their nobility and love of glory was not simply a function of the family's prominence" (τῇ τοῦ γένους … ἐπισημό

blood," as were, among other things, courage, strength, wisdom, wit, and even martial prowess.

A large number of physical and character traits, some specific, others more general, can be identified in the Byzantine sources as being considered heritable, but there is little indication that these sources thought to differentiate between those that could be inherited from one's mother or father. Women tend to be compared to their mothers or other female relatives, while men are compared to other men (though numerous exceptions to this general rule exist, as in the example of Anna Komnene). This is not surprising, especially considering the gendered nature of Byzantine values. It can be difficult to differentiate between rhetorical devices meant to praise an individual by comparing him or her to famous ancestors and those comments meant to be understood as commentaries on biological inheritance, but the exercise is still worthwhile and deserves a more thorough investigation in the future. What is clear is that inherited qualities were highly valued and moved hand-in-hand with an increased emphasis on ancestry as a marker of personal virtue and social standing. Yet, the problem of the supposed imperfection of female descent expressed in Zonaras's history remains.

## Contested Kinship and the Language of "Mixed" Descent

Byzantine literature from any period is full of references both to "pure" and, especially, to "mixed" descent, even if the precise meaning or particular significance is not always clear. Thus, one finds in the pages of Procopius's *The Wars* the following statement regarding the nation of the Rugi. "But since they [the Rugi] had absolutely no intercourse with women other than their own, each successive generation of children was of unmixed blood, and thus they had preserved the name of their nation among themselves."[87]

A similar idea is expressed in the so-called *Vita Basilii*. The author claims that Emperor Basil I, despite his humble origins as a peasant farmer in Macedonia, was in fact descended both from the ancient Arsakid dynasty of Armenia and a close relative of Emperor Constantine I. In order to boost the effect that this claim might have on opinions of Basil himself, the author tells his readers that Basil's ancestors, after they had relocated to the Macedonian countryside, "protected their ancestral nobility and maintained [their] *genos* unmixed."[88] John Tzetzes, who wrote an autobiographical poem in the mid-twelfth century, claims that he is "pure Greek" on his father's side.[89]

τητι); rather, it stemmed also from the exceeding splendor of their actions …" Attaleiates, *History*, 27.8, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 396–99.

**87** Procopius, *History of The Wars* 7.2.2–3, ed. and trans. Henry Bronson Dewing, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

**88** *Theophanes Continuatus* 5.215.20: τὴν πάτριον εὐγένειαν διασώζοντες καὶ ἀσύγχυτον τὸ γένος διαφυλάττοντες.

**89** Tzetzes claims that, on his father's side, he was a "pure Greek" (κατὰ δὲ πατέρα καθαρῶς Ἑλλάδος γονῆς in the title, καὶ τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα, γονῆς Ἑλλάδος καθαρᾶς, γονῆς ἀκαιφνεστάτης). See Paul Gautier, "La curieuse ascendance de Jean Tzetzès," *REB* 28 (1970): 209–11, lines 629–30.

Such claims were not common, even in the twelfth century, but they could nevertheless be made.

Anna Komnene employs both the concept of purity of decent and "half-breed" (μιξοβάρβαρος) several times throughout the *Alexiad*.[90] A century earlier, Psellos, in his letter to the nephews of Patriarch Keroularios, mentions how many were "accustomed to laugh" when one child was born to a couple with "bluish-gray" eyes, while another born to the same parents displayed lighter gray or black eyes or if they differed significantly in the placement of the eyes on the face. According to Psellos, even if this was considered to be some kind of portent, still "we call such [children] half-castes (ἠμιγε νεῖς)."[91] From the mid-eleventh century, sources begin to describe those who lived in areas affected by the loss of imperial territory to foreign invaders, especially the Seljuq Turks, as "*mixobarbaroi*."[92] While such words sometimes appear without any judgment, in many cases such appellations carried with them distinct cultural references, many of them negative.

There is certainly evidence that Byzantine writers increasingly took an interest in specifying the precise relationship of individuals with their relatives and/or ancestors. Narratives of the later eleventh and, especially, the twelfth century often give much fuller descriptions of the family relations of their actors than do their counterparts composed in previous periods. These descriptions frequently include differentiating between relatives on the father's or mother's side (typically πάτροθεν or μήτροθεν, respectively). In the history covering the reigns of John II and Manuel I Komnenos written by John Kinnamos at the end of the twelfth century, for example, indications that individuals were related to others "on the father's side" are especially common.[93] This phenomenon coincides with the increasing use of surnames as they appear in sources of all kinds, as well as what Patlagean has observed to be a broader and more specialized vocabulary for kinship in general.[94] It appears that Byzantine writers in the late eleventh and, especially, twelfth century were becoming increasingly concerned not only to record an individual's *genos* and, with it, their family connections to contemporaries or ancestors, but also the precise way in which such individuals were related to or descended from

**90** Komnene, *Alexiad*, 7.9, trans. Sewter, 238–39. "A certain half-caste" who knew the "Scythian language" is mentioned twice. At 15.5 (trans. Sewter, 485), Anna again uses the term "half-breeds," this time for Turks with at least one Greek/Roman forbear. In all, the term "mixobarbaros" (μιξοβάρβαρος) appears eleven times in the narrative. Elsewhere (10.10), she has a Frank declare himself "pure Frank" (καθαρὸς Φράγγος). Translations given here are Sewter's.

**91** Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 516: καὶ μέντοι καὶ γελᾷν εἰώθαμεν, ὅταν τῷ τὸν μὲν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἴδωμεν χαροπόν, ὑπόγλαυκον δὲ τὸν ἄλλον ἢ μέλανα, κἂν εἴ τῷ ἡ μὲν τῶν ὀφρύων ἄνω που τέταται, ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ βλέφαρον κάθηται, μετὰ τῶν τεράτων τοῦτο τιθέαμεν, καὶ ἠμιγενεῖς τοὺς οὕτως ἔχοντας ὀνομάζομεν.

**92** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 380. This appellation was even directed at those still technically living in areas controlled by the Byzantine government.

**93** For example, John Kinnamos, *History of the Deeds of John and Manuel Komnenos*, ed. A. Meineke (Bonn: Weber, 1836), 2.2, 4, and 7.

**94** Patlagean, "Families and Kinships in Byzantium," 472.

others. This could indeed have implications for our interpretation of Zonaras's criticism of Constantine X, though exactly how remains an open question.

The language used by Zonaras in the passage is informative. The verb employed to indicate "adulterated," κεκιβδηλευμένην, also carried with it connotations of falsehood, spuriousness, and even that which is forbidden.[95] It is a rather uncommon verb in the medieval Byzantine lexicon, and when it does appear, it is usually in a religious context and used to describe the doctrine of heretics.[96] "Mixing," however, is a much more common concept in Byzantine sources concerning kinship. It could have either positive or negative connotations, depending on context. The use of *epimixia* (ἐπιμιξία), as in Zonaras's case, was distinctly negative in most cases.

As discussed earlier, incest was typically called "blood-mixing" (αἰμομιξία) in secular and canon law. In the *Basilika*, parents in a sexual relationship with their children or siblings in a similar situation are called "blood-mixers" (αἰμομίκται) and face the penalty of death. More distant consanguineous kin who are caught in illicit sexual relationships are neither faced with capital punishment, nor are they described as "blood-mixers."[97] In the Tome of Sisinnios, the patriarch uses the concept of "mixing" and "intermingling" in reference to incest. He claims that marriage practices in ancient Israel fostered an environment in which incest (described using the term "*epimixia*," ἐπιμιξίαν) was endemic.[98] Further along, Sisinnios argues that it was imperative that Christians "fear very much the marital mixing and intertwining [i.e. intercourse] with one another. For it is never permitted that [a man] approach his own flesh, because of the perturbation and intermingling of the *genos*."[99] Patriarch Michael Keroularios himself uses the phrase "the mixing of blood" (ἡ ἐπιμιξία τοῦ αἵματος) in reference to incest several times in his opinions in debates over marriage impediments in the mid-eleventh century.[100]

Beyond such references in the legal and theological literature, many other sources record a similar use of the concept of "mixed" descent, often as a form of denigration. Basil "the Nothos" ("bastard"), illegitimate son of Emperor Romanos Lekapenos, is described by Leo the Deacon in just such a way. Leo states that "since he was of mixed

**95** Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 753; Erich Trapp, *Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität, besonders des 9.–12. Jahrhunderts* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 830.

**96** For example, the verb is used in one of Eustathios of Thessaloniki's letters to describe heretics. They appear as "falsifiers/adulterers of the pure message" (τὸ τῆς ἀγγελίας κιβδηλεύουσι καθαρόν). Eustathios of Thessaloniki, *Ep.* 45, lines 43 and 45, ed. Foteini Kolovou, *Die Briefe des Eustathios von Thessalonike* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2006).

**97** *Basilika* 60.37.75.

**98** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 13.

**99** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 16: ὡς ἐπάναγκες εἶναι τούτοις εὐλαβεῖσθαι καὶ δεδιέναι σφαλερὰν τὴν εἰς ἀλλήλους γαμικὴν ἐπιμιξίαν καὶ συμπλοκήν· οὐ γὰρ ἑνὸν εἰσιέναι πρὸς πάντα οἰκεῖον σαρκὸς, διὰ τὰς συνθολώσεις καὶ συγχύσεις τοῦ γένους. The injunction against a man approaching his own flesh is, of course, biblical.

**100** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 40ff.

race (τὸ γένος ἔχων ἐπίμικτον), he was energetic and most resourceful in carrying out every idea that occurred to him."[101] Leo's assertion of Basil's "mixed race" seems to have been motivated by the fact that his mother was a "Scythian," rather than his illegitimacy. Yet while Zonaras's language might have several precedents in Byzantine literature, none of the examples given address his apparent issue with descent through the female line.

## Genealogies of Women and Descent in the Female Line

Byzantine society is often regarded as largely free of the dominance of patrilineal descent and primogeniture associated with medieval Europe.[102] Although Byzantine law favoured equitable, bilateral inheritance and family names could be inherited through the maternal line as easily as through the paternal, there is considerable disagreement among scholars concerning the role of gender in the Byzantine reckoning of descent. From at least the ninth century until the beginning of the eleventh, the largely military character of provincial aristocracy seems to have given certain preference to male ancestors and descendants.[103] Relationships by marriage with imperial dynasties may also have mattered more if they were on the paternal side.[104] Modern scholarship on Byzantium often assumes that male-line heredity was the primary means of reproducing one's *genos*.[105] Indeed, such claims are not entirely without support in the Byzantine sources.

According to Psellos, the Macedonian dynasty went extinct at the death of Constantine VIII in 1028.[106] This contrasts with the usual practice among modern historians, who tend to calculate the end of the dynasty at the death of his daughter, Theodora, in 1056. This might be compared to Michael Attaleiates's description of the demise of Emperor Michael V. He describes the downfall of Michael's "entire *genos*," yet only males are indicated.[107]

Male and female heirs were also treated quite differently from each other in a *praktikon* of 1073, which records a gift of land from Emperor Michael VII to Andronikos Doukas.[108] Litavrin has demonstrated that the author of the document consistently

**101** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 47.1–2: τὸ παριστάμενον αὐτῷ εἰς ἔργον ἐξενεγκεῖν προμηθέστατος, ἅτε τὸ γένος ἔχων ἐπίμικτον.

**102** Laiou, "Family Structure and the Transmission of Property," 59.

**103** Laiou, "Family Structure and the Transmission of Property," 59.

**104** Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie à Byzance," 277.

**105** For example, Paul Magdalino, "Byzantine Snobbery," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy, IX to XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 1984), 64.

**106** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.53, trans. Sewter, 308.

**107** Attaleiates, *History*, 4.3: … τοὺς δὲ λοιποὺς ἀκμῆτας καὶ τὸν ἴουλον ἐπανθοῦντας, οὓς δὲ καὶ προσήβους, ἑκτομίας ἀπεργασάμενος· καὶ τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον καταστρέψας …; trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 16–20.

**108** Gennadij G. Litavrin, "Family Relations and Family Law in the Byzantine Countryside of the Eleventh Century: An Analysis of the Praktikon of 1073," *DOP* 44 (1990): 189.

favours males as heads of household and that "order of succession was based primarily on the principle of lineal descent: from grandfather to father to son to grandson."[109] There is not a single case in the *praktikon* in which a collateral relative, even a man, would have inherited control of a household. The document is written following the norms and aims of the imperial financial administration, and the individuals and households recorded in it were not members of the social elite, yet it is nevertheless an important attestation of agnatic, linear inheritance in eleventh-century Byzantium.

Despite such evidence, however, it is also clear that Byzantine authors had little problem praising a man's ancestors on either side of his family. Michael Psellos's praise for Constantine X's ancestors is a good example. "His family, as far back as his great-grandfathers, had been both distinguished and affluent, the kind of persons historians record in their works … to this very day the names of the celebrated Andronicus, of Constantine, of Pantherius, are on everybody's lips—all relatives of his, some on the paternal, others on the mother's, side."[110] Constantine's wife is also praised. "His wife was herself a member of a famous family (she was the daughter of the great Constantine Dalassenus, a man well known throughout the civilized world for his strength) and she was a lady of much beauty."[111]

Not only does Michael Psellos include the maternal line (even if only males are named) in his praise of Constantine X's ancestry, he also has no problem admitting that his own mother's ancestors were much more illustrious than those of his father.[112] The same is true of his own wife. In his funerary oration for his daughter, Styliane, who had died tragically young, Psellos says "she was descended from high nobility on her mother's side; drops of imperial blood flowed in her veins or, rather, of ancestors who were closely related to emperors and registered as the fathers of emperors and joined to them by marriage; it was from them that she received the brilliance of her ancestry …"[113]

Throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, references to ancestors on the mother's side are not uncommon, though they rarely appear without being accompanied by a reference to those on the father's side. Hence, on a twelfth-century lead seal belonging to one John Kontostephanos Komnenos, the owner is described as "Kontostephanos on [his] father's side, Komnenos on [his] mother's."[114] In cases in which no distinction is made, the male line is typically (but not universally) meant.

Such observations primarily take into account the ancestry given by the sources for men, as the vast majority of cases deal with them. There are, however, a few instances

**109** Litavrin, "Family Relations and Family Law in the Byzantine Countryside of the Eleventh Century," 189.

**110** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.6, trans. Sewter, 333.

**111** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.6, trans. Sewter, 333.

**112** Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters*, 52–57 (2a–4b).

**113** Kaldellis, *Mothers and Sons, Fathers and Daughters*, 119 (§5).

**114** Seal no. 119 (Zacos-Veglery 2724, housed in Basel) in Nicolas Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1986), 113–14. John Kontostephanos Komnenos (ca. 1162–1166); Inscription on both sides: Κοντοστέφανος Ἰωάννης πατρόθεν ταῦτα σφραγίζι Κομνηνὸς δὲ μητρόθεν.

in which one can glimpse women offering their own depictions of themselves and their ancestry. Anna Komnene describes her parents in the introduction (*prooemium*) to her last will and testament. She describes them "My father was Alexios Komnenos, that most illustrious emperor of the Roman people, whose trophies, deeds of prowess, and stratagems against the surrounding barbarians … Eirene was my mother, the great joy and adornment of kingship; a scion of the Doukai family, she illumined the entire earth under the sun with her virtues. No one among men could rival her in any respect."[115] Anna does not give any additional commentary on her ancestry. Her focus is squarely on her parents. In another will from the last decade of the eleventh century, Kale, wife of Symbatios Pakourianos, stresses her connection to her father and his *genos* above other relations. When she introduces herself, she names her father before her mother and includes her father's title, *kouropalates*.[116] In both of these cases, even women acting on their own behalf seem inclined to emphasize their fathers over and above their mothers, even if both are named.

The *typikon* for the monastery of the Theotokos Kecharitomene, founded sometime between 1110 and 1116 by Eirene Doukaina, offers an interesting counter-example to male-focused genealogies.[117] Eirene ensured that the monastery, which housed only female nuns, would remain in the control of female members of her family. She stipulates that, upon her death, control would pass to her eldest daughter, Anna Komnene. After Anna, it was to pass to her other *porphyrogennete* daughter, Maria, alongside Anna's own daughter. If these women should die, it should pass to another daughter of Anna or to a granddaughter or great-granddaughter and so on, "for my majesty wishes her daughters and granddaughters and great-granddaughters and so on, as long as the female line continues, to oversee the convent of my Mother of God Kecharitomene, the one who is eldest."[118] If this direct line of descendants were to fail, Eirene wanted the foundation to pass into the hands of one of her or her daughter's daughters-in-law, specifically the one married to the oldest male descendant.[119] If all of these should fail, Eirene asks that the nuns in the convent choose as their head "the lady from [among] the most distinguished of our [Eirene's] family (*genos*)."[120]

Kecharitomene was designed to act as a kind of inheritance for the female members of her family. Eirene shows a clear preference for linear inheritance (from mother to daughter) and prefers elder children over younger. If the situation were reversed, so that the monastery had been founded by and for men, it would appear as suggestive evidence of patrilineal inheritance and primogeniture. Even if such inheritance models

**115** Papaioannou, "Anna Komnene's Will," 105. Translation by Papaioannou.

**116** Jacques Lefort, Nicolas Oikonomidès, and Denise Papachryssanthou, ed., *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), no. 187.

**117** Gautier, "Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè," 5–165; *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 649–724.

**118** *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 709–10.

**119** *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 709–10.

**120** *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 710.

were discouraged by Byzantine law, there were clearly ways around it and certain cultural trends in the twelfth century that favoured the model put forth by Eirene Doukaina.

While many modern scholars have more or less explicitly expressed the view that agnatic descent (via the male line) was generally favoured, or at least given more weight than the female line, Byzantine sources from the tenth through the early twelfth century only do so periodically and, often, implicitly. There is an abundance of evidence that appears to argue for their acceptance of uterine descent as no less legitimate than agnatic, despite some exceptions. Narrative sources and other forms of literature produced in Byzantium from the tenth through twelfth centuries do mention male ancestors far more often than females, even when describing women. Yet male authors seem to have no problem emphasizing the nobility of their *genos* through female antecedents or maternal grandparents.

## Conclusion

Zonaras's critique of Constantine X's ancestry may remain something of an anomaly, yet further research may show that he was not alone in his opinion of the imperfect transmission of kinship through the female line. It is not unreasonable to suggest that Galenic ideas of women as imperfect men may have influenced Zonaras and others like him. Not only were Galen and other medical texts read by a large number of Byzantine authors, there is ample evidence to suggest that such knowledge of human reproduction was considered foundational in medieval Byzantine thought on the nature of kinship. Medical and related knowledge, alongside the cultural significance of blood and perceptions of traits carried in the blood, are a potentially useful place to look for Byzantine thought on the nature of the mechanics of descent, the bonds of consanguinity, and the *genos*.

There is no question that Byzantine sources of the eleventh and twelfth centuries display a keen interest in consanguineous kinship as the expression of shared blood and in differentiating this bond from other forms of social bonds, including alternate forms of kinship. This interest only increased over time. The sources betray a clear concern not only with enumerating family ties and individuals' ancestry, but also in the elaboration of the nature of shared blood using a variety of authorities. The frequency with which the sources, especially from the twelfth century, describe lines of descent through the female line cannot be ignored. Even if some individuals clearly did not give equal weight to the female contribution to the act of reproduction and disproportionately focus on agnatic lines of descent, the mother's contribution was not meaningless.

When women appear in genealogical descriptions, they tend to appear as links between two or more male members of the family, effectively limiting any female agency in the construction of family memory. Ancestors through the female line certainly mattered and receive mention in surviving sources, but these ancestors are almost always males, even when the subject of the genealogy is a woman. Women in these cases appear as links in the chain, but they tend not to be celebrated themselves. In a sense, female ancestors or family members did not typically "illuminate" the *genos* themselves, they simply allowed other, male relatives to do so through the biological links they helped to create. This should come as no surprise, since women generally contributed

to the family's honour by staying out of the public eye. Men, on the other hand, were expected to enhance the reputation of the *genos* through deeds and behaviour that would be very much visible, both to other members of the aristocracy and to a broader public. In sum, while there is certainly some evidence to suggest that descent through the male line was given more weight than through the female, there is not enough to argue against Byzantine society recognizing cognatic lines of descent.

Blood was not the only thing an individual inherited through the *genos*. The proliferation of heritable surnames as outward markers of the *genos* meant that an individual also inherited a specific reputation attached to their surname. This reputation was carefully built up over several generations and needed to be carefully maintained by all members sharing the same *genos*.

Chapter 5

# FAMILY NAMES AND THE POLITICS OF REPUTATION

αἱρετώτερον ὄνομα καλὸν ἢ πλοῦτος πολύς

A good name is more desirable than great riches.

Proverbs 22:1

SOMETIME IN 1056 or 1057, Emperor Michael VI presented his nephew, also named Michael, with the imperial title *Doux* of Antioch, making him one of the most important imperial officials in the extreme southeast of the empire. In addition to the title, according to John Skylitzes, the emperor also bestowed upon him "the name of Ouranos on the occasion of his proclamation because his *genos* supposedly derived from the ancient Ouranos. The emperor honored him with the title *magister* of Antioch which that other Ouranos [Nikephoros] had held."[1]

As the passage suggests, the previous *Doux* of Antioch, Nikephoros Ouranos, had gained immense fame under Basil II. In 1000, Basil gave Nikephoros extraordinary powers in Antioch, charging him with preventing potential Arab-Muslim incursions in the region.[2] By laying claim to membership in that same *genos* through the use of the surname (ἐπίκλησις), the new governor might hope to take part in Nikephoros's fame and good reputation both in Antioch and in the rest of the empire, to openly align himself with local, aristocratic factions, or, at the very least, to make himself more recognizable to the local populace. The emperor had bestowed the name upon his nephew just like an imperial office, and, like an imperial office, the name carried with it a certain cultural resonance and enhanced its bearer's authority, in this case because of the reputation earned by a previous generation. This Michael may or may not have had legitimate genealogical ties to the family of Nikephoros Ouranos. The reality of biological ties, however, was less important than the *perception* of a link between the man and the *genos* of Ouranos.[3]

Heritable surnames, as the most visible markers of the *genos*, served as an important source of political and social capital for members of the Byzantine elite in the tenth through twelfth centuries. Family names served as a kind of shorthand for a range of characteristics that could be manipulated both by members of the family and by

**1** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 483, trans. Wortley, 451.

**2** For the extraordinary position held by Nikephoros Ouranos in Antioch, see his lead seal in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, Fogg 1576. The seal has been published as no. 99.11 in the *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, ed. Eric McGeer et al., vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 177. On the seal, Nikephoros bears the title "Master of the East" (κρατοῦντι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς).

**3** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations,* 254.

outsiders who encountered these individuals or their surname. The specific set of distinctive features associated with a given surname was a major concern for members of aristocratic *genē* and was crucial for the intergenerational reproduction of their social and political standing. In a society in which fame and reputation were vital in the acquisition and maintenance of social and political status, Byzantine elites used a variety of means to reinforce the broader conception of their family name as synonymous with traits that would be socially and politically beneficial. Patronage of literary productions, including histories, poems, and orations, served to disseminate this reputation among aristocratic circles. Conspicuous displays of wealth or piety in the form of lavish estates or religious foundations, especially in Constantinople, could also serve this purpose. Lead seals, due to their ubiquity and wide circulation, were an especially effective means to celebrate and advertise the qualities of one's *genos* and his/her affiliation with it. The fact that epigrammatic inscriptions on lead seals, common after the mid-eleventh century, also allow the observer a more direct view of the words of the seals' owners themselves makes them particularly valuable to a study like this one.

Reputation, broadly defined, was a central component determining social status and political allegiances in this period of Byzantine history, and it was through the enhancement and maintenance of the specific reputation of a family name that aristocratic *genē* developed a unique identity, both self-assigned and amongst others. The cumulative reputation developed and fostered over multiple generations and associated with a family name was a major driving force behind many of these families' actions. The particular social and political conditions in the Byzantine Empire in the tenth and eleventh centuries meant that, without heritable imperial offices or the kind of quasi-sovereign power exercised over a given region found in parts of the contemporary West,[4] individual families turned to their family name as a means of ensuring the reproduction of their social and political standing in subsequent generations. In this way, at least to some extent, heritable surnames may be understood as serving some of the same functions and holding some of the same socio-political currency as imperial titles, conferring upon their holder a degree of authority or prestige by virtue of the specific set of distinguishing characteristics associated with that name, bolstered by the purposeful manipulation and dissemination of that reputation by members of the family themselves.

## Fame, Reputation, and Social Status in Byzantium

Reputation formed one of the basic components of status in Byzantine society. As Leonora Neville has argued, "community perception and judgment of honorable conduct" was one of the most important markers of social status in the middle Byzantine period.[5] Adjectives such as *periphanēs* (περιφανής, "famous"), *phaneros* (φανερός, lit. "visible" or "well known"), *onomastos* (όνομαστός, lit. "named;" "famous"), *epainetos*

**4** Chris Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: Illuminating the Dark Ages, 400–1000* (New York: Viking, 2009), 317.

**5** Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society*, 78–80.

(ἐπαινετός, "worthy of praise"), and *episēmos* (ἐπίσημος, "notable") dominate Byzantine literature as descriptors of individuals and families of high social standing. Fame, or *kleos* (κλέος), could itself be instrumental in determining an individual's or family's elevated social status. The same word used for "honour," *timē* (τιμή), was also used to refer to imperial offices or titles, which would generally be the greatest single contributor to the family's wealth as well. Glory (δόξα), on the other hand, was generally best achieved on the battlefield. Those from an undistinguished family are frequently described in terms relating to fame or reputation, or more accurately, the lack thereof, and appear with the descriptors *asēmos* (ἄσημος) or *akleēs* (ἀκλεής), i.e. "undistinguished" or "without fame."[6]

Even the increasing emphasis on nobility by birth after the mid-eleventh century was only effective in bolstering influence among aristocratic families inasmuch as this nobility was recognized by their peers and the Byzantine population writ large. This is visible in Michael Psellos's *Chronographia*, where the author notes that "although Isaac [I Komnenos] had been elected emperor and Constantine [X Doukas] had been promised the lesser honor of *Caesar*, the latter's more noble ancestry and his extremely loveable nature made him a favorite among the people."[7] Psellos does not simply state that Constantine's "more noble ancestry" made him more eligible for the throne. Rather, it was the Constantinopolitan public's recognition of the value of that nobility that gave it its power.

Elsewhere, when describing the early stages of Isaac Komnenos's bid for the throne, Psellos states that he "won over to his side the most powerful families, persons whom they knew by name."[8] Having one's name known is presented as the equivalent of high social status. Whether these names refer to personal or family names is left ambiguous, but this kind of name recognition was a central component of the social and political standing among the medieval Byzantine elite.

For Kekaumenos, the enhancement of one's reputation is an important goal in itself, and to receive praise or notoriety for one's actions is frequently reward enough. In his advice to his sons, he says, "Seek to be worthy of memory and praise."[9] "You should desire to be one of those worthy of praise and memory, not pleasure seekers."[10] If they keep an estate on or near the coast and brings ships safely into their harbour, "they will be praised by all."[11] "Strive to be noble (εὐγενὴς), honourable (τίμιος), praiseworthy (ἐπαινετός), and glorified (ἔνδοξος) by the emperor and by all."[12]

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**6** For example, Michael Psellos, *Orations*, no. 2, 338–39: Ἐν τούτῳ δὲ ἀνήρ τις, τό τε εἶδος τῶν φαυλοτάτων καὶ τὸ γένος τῶν ἀκλεῶν …

**7** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.88, trans. Sewter, 328.

**8** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.5, trans. Sewter, 278.

**9** Kekaumenos, 129.5–6: σὺ δὲ μὴ τῶν ἐνηδόνων, ἀλλὰ τῶν ἐπαινετῶν καὶ μνήμης ἀξίων ἐπιθύμει.

**10** Kekaumenos, 139.5–8.

**11** Kekaumenos, 223.

**12** Kekaumenos, 218.

In the same way, the potential damage caused to one's personal or familial reputation is presented in *Advice and Anecdotes* as a primary motivating factor against any action that could result in "loss of face." "Do not mingle with a fool (ἄφρονος), for he could ruin you and bring you shame. All may laugh at you."[13] One of the first scenarios depicted in *Advice and Anecdotes* deals with the appropriate course of action if one should find himself facing an individual who has been "speaking badly" about him.[14] "Do not quarrel with your brother, even if you think you have been wronged by him, for people will consider you and him brother-haters (μισάδελφοι)."[15] Rather than focusing on the negative economic consequences arising from discord among the brothers, Kekaumenos portrays social ruin in terms of the public perception of their actions and, by extension, their character. Kekaumenos is widely known for his near obsession with a fear of ruin, which for him meant above all loss of face, that is, the loss of reputation.[16]

Michael Attaleiates offers his own definition of fame and good reputation in his late eleventh-century *History*, which forms a part of the (probably fictional) genealogical ties of his patron, Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates, with the *genos* of Phokas and, through them, with the classical Roman Fabii. He states, "As for the family of the Phokades (τὰ μὲν τοῦ γένους τῶν Φωκάδων), those from the generations closest to us are celebrated and known to all (περίφημά τε καὶ περιβόητα). As witnesses to this we may cite both the old accounts and the emperor lord Nikephoros Phokas himself …"[17] Immediately following this is a summary of Nikephoros Phokas's accomplishments for which he and his family became "celebrated and known to all." He took the reins of government when the empire was hemmed in by Arabs, he "reconquered lands and breathed new life into the state," he "defeated enemies who had been rampaging in the east," and he retook the island of Crete. "He was pious in all affairs that pertained to God, most discerning in his decisions, and most brave as a general." Even Phokas's extreme piety, however, is related back to his military successes by Attaleiates, who makes explicit that his "encomium to [Nikephoros's] piety" is designed as a contribution "to a discussion of military affairs."[18] The majority of the rest of the chapter is dedicated to a detailed retelling of Nikephoros Phokas's re-conquest of the island of Crete in 961. Clearly what is most important to Attaleiates in his attempts to glorify his patron is the martial pedigree of Botaneiates's ancestors.

Kekaumenos, a near-contemporary of Attaleiates, paints a similar picture. He is most concerned with cultivating a reputation on the battlefield, though justice and fairness

**13** Kekaumenos, 155.

**14** Kekaumenos, 4: ἀλλ' ἐάν τις λαλῇ κατὰ σοῦ, κατ' ἰδίαν αὐτὸν προσκαλεσάμενος, εἰπὲ αὐτῷ μετὰ ἤθους χρηστοῦ· ἀδελφέ, τί σε ἐλύπησα καὶ καταλαλεῖς μου; ἐὰν ἠδικήθης τι παρ'ἐμοῦ, εἰπὲ καὶ διορθοῦμαι τοῦτο.

**15** Kekaumenos, 146: μὴ μάχου μετὰ ἀδελφοῦ σου, εἰ καὶ δοκεῖς σὺ βλαβῆναι παρ' αὐτοῦ, ἐπεὶ σύ τε κάκεῖνος μισάδελφοι τοῖς πολλοῖς λογισθήσεσθε.

**16** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 207.

**17** Attaleiates, *History* 28.1, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 406–7.

**18** Attaleiates, *History*, 28.1, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 408–9: … τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας ἐγκώμιον ἐν τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς παραγγέλμασι.

are also important. Kekaumenos gives his son the same advice he gives his troops: "Work to outdo everyone else [in battle], so that you might become widely known (ὀνομαστός)."[19] "Do what you're ordered and what seems to you worthy of awe (θαυμαστόν) and of praise (ἐπαινετόν) so that you might become known (ὀνομαστός)."[20] In fact, every instance of the term *onomastos* in *Advice and Anecdotes* occurs in a military context.

The kind of values espoused by both Attaleiates and Kekaumenos as they concern the acquisition and maintenance of reputation is closely related to concepts of glory (δόξα) and honour (τιμή). One need not look far for additional evidence that the acquisition of glory was a primary concern and that this glory not only reflected upon the individual, but also on their *genos*. In the Tome of Sisinnios, the late tenth-century patriarchal ruling on marriage impediments, the patriarch describes some of the possible motivations for the circumvention of established marriage law by members of the elite. The first is for the "glory of the *genos*" (δόξα γένους).[21] Indeed, there is ample reason to believe that marriage partners were often sought precisely because of the additional fame and political clout they could bring to the family.[22] Just over a century after Sisinnios, in the pages of the fictional narrative *Digenes Akrites*, the hero is described as desiring to accomplish great deeds in order "to honour and illuminate his *genos*."[23]

Emperor Leo VI, in his military handbook known simply as the *Taktika*, regards fame and a good reputation as one of the most important attributes in the selection of a general. "We call for a man of good reputation (Ἔνδοξον). An army becomes disgusted and angry when placed under the command of a man who is not respected (τοῖς ἀδόξοις) … Truly great virtue does not permit a man to remain unnoticed for long (ἡ γὰρ τοσαύτη ἀρετὴ ἄσημον ἄνθρωπον διαμένειν ἐπιπολὺ οὐ καταλιμπάνει)."[24] For Leo, as for many Byzantines, fame was the natural result of virtuous actions, so that the two were virtually synonymous.

Beyond military virtues and extreme piety, a *genos*'s geographic origins were also an important piece of information encoded within the family name. This was relevant for two main reasons: the importance placed on loyalty to one's *patris* (πατρίς), or "fatherland," which could refer both to the empire as a whole and to a specific region or city therein, and the role Byzantine thinkers (in line with Greco-Roman tradition) assigned to geography and ethnic origins in determining physical, emotional, and cultural traits.[25] In fact, geographic regions appear almost as often as family names or ancestors as

**19** Kekaumenos, 86–87: καὶ ἀγωνίζου ὑπερέχειν πάντας, ὅπως γένῃ ὀνομαστός.

**20** Kekaumenos, 86.6–87.2.

**21** Rhalles and Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱέρων κανόνων*, vol. 5, 18. Other items in the list include the number of titles or offices held by the future spouse or his/her family, the wealth of the man, or the beauty of the woman.

**22** Laiou, *Mariage, amour et parenté*, 34–36.

**23** *Digenes Akrites* G 4.94–6: δοξάσασθαι καὶ τὸ γένος λαμπρῦναι.

**24** Leo VI, *Taktika*, 22–23 ("Qualities Required in a General," §13), ed. and trans. George T. Dennis, revised edition (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014).

**25** Michael Psellos, in a separate letter, repeats the classical Greek understanding of the relationship between geography, climate, and human characteristics/culture, arguing that "those dwelling in different climates are given over to different customs" (αἵ τε διάφοροι τῶν κλιμάτων οἰκήσεις,

modifiers of *genos* in the sources, even those produced well into the twelfth and even thirteenth centuries. At the same time, geographic markers, i.e. toponyms, are some of the most common origins of family names in Byzantium.[26] Even the general attribution of familial origins "in the east" carried with it a certain degree of prestige beginning in the mid-tenth century, precisely because of the reputation earned by several prominent families of the central and eastern Anatolian plateau. Thus, Leo the Deacon deemed it worthy to record that Emperor John I Tzimiskes was "descended from a very distinguished family, of noble birth on his father's side, from the east."[27]

Individuals or families originating in certain regions were variously ascribed certain physical or character traits. One tenth-century source claims that those from Paphlagonia, a region in northwestern Anatolia, were "an ancient and reprehensible nation (*genos*), notorious for their shamelessness and bad character."[28] Emperor Constantine VII was known to have quoted Homer (*Iliad* 2.851–55) in order to support his claim that mules originated in Paphlagonia, which explains its people's "wickedness and brutishness."[29] In fact, several sources agree that "Paphlagonians were despicable: swinish as well as doltish, barbaric, unclean, conniving and fraudulent."[30] It is clear, however, that Byzantine attitudes about Paphlagonians were not simply regurgitated *topoi* from antiquity, but continually evolved and were affected by contemporary realities.[31]

Women also played a role in the pursuit of fame and reputation among aristocratic families. Both sexes received honour when fulfilling idealized roles within the family. For men, honour was intimately tied to bravery, the expression of martial valour, and other, public acts. For women, on the other hand, honour came largely from modesty in all its forms. The ideal Byzantine woman, at least in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, was supposed to "identify herself through her devotion to her immediate family."[32] Anna Komnene exemplifies exactly this attitude throughout the "Prologue" to her (lost) will,

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ἀλλοτρίας τῶν οἰκητόρων τὰς γνώμας ἀποδιδόασιν). See Sathas, *Μεσαιωνικὴ βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 5, 515 (no. 208).

**26** Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," 267–94.

**27** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 99.15–17: λαμπροτάτου γὰρ γένους ὁ Ἰωάννης κατήγετο, πρὸς μὲν πατρὸς εὐγενὴς τῶν ἀφ᾽ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν; trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 148–49. The language is borrowed from Job 1:3 as it appears in the Septuagint: ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος εὐγενὴς τῶν ἀφ᾽ ἡλίου ἀνατολῶν.

**28** Constantine VII, *De thematibus*, ed. Agostino Pertusi (Modena: Foto Lito Dini, 1952).

**29** Paul Magdalino, "Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society," in *Byzantine Asia Minor (6th–12th cent.*), ed. Stelios Lampakis (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation Institute for Byzantine Research, 1998), 141–50, quotes taken from 141.

**30** Magdalino, "Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society," 141–50, quotes taken from 141.

**31** For example, in the medieval period, the Paphlagonians earned the further reputation for producing a large number of eunuchs. See Magdalino, "Paphlagonians in Byzantine High Society," 142.

**32** Stamatina McGrath, "Women in Byzantine History in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Some Theoretical Considerations," in *Byzantine Religious Culture: Studies in Honor of Alice-Mary Talbot*, ed. Denis Sullivan, Elizabeth Fisher, and Stratis Papaioannou (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 95.

in which she consistently portrays herself as a devoted wife and daughter.[33] Despite her predictable emphasis on her own "innate modesty" (αίδώς), however, Anna is careful to highlight the nobility of her *genos* and the high social status of her natal (and affinal) family. Her mother's *typikon* for the monastery of Kecharitomene expresses a similar pride in her own family's (Doukas) prominent social standing.[34]

Those women associated with the imperial throne either through marriage or blood ties with the emperor were held to their own standards of behaviour and comportment. These virtues are made explicit in Michael Italikos's improvised (αύτοσχεδίως) oration to Eirene Doukaina, wife of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, in which he praises her for her "imperial" virtues: temperance, courage (given a distinctly male quality here), equity, and wisdom in her "words and acts."[35] Her case is most certainly specific to an empress, as these virtues correspond roughly to the four imperial virtues from Menander.[36] Imperial women, like other women of their day, also earned praise and notoriety in their role as (good) mothers. This was especially true in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, during which time Emperor Alexios I Komnenos's mother, Anna Dalassene, became well- known for her role not only as the dutiful mother of the emperor, but also as a forceful, political personality in her own right.[37]

The image of reputation presented here is not intended to be exhaustive, and Byzantine ideals concerning the acquisition of fame and reputation were not limited to martial valour, piety, and (for women) modesty. Still, cultural trends in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium placed an ever greater emphasis on military virtues and, secondarily, piety as desirable "distinguishing characteristics." Geographic and ethnic origins, as well as inter-familial alliances or feuds remained relevant throughout the period, as did any number of additional virtues or vices (e.g. generosity or fairness).[38] Such individual characteristics were intimately linked with the *genos* through the use of heritable surnames, which publicly bound together the kin group's members through common association.

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**33** Papaioannou, "Anna Komnene's Will," 111ff.

**34** Papaioannou, "Anna Komnene's Will," 110n42.

**35** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep.* 15, 149–50, lines 13–19 and 1–16, respectively.

**36** *Menander Rhetor*, 78–98.

**37** Mullett, "The 'Disgrace' of the Ex-Basilissa Maria," 208.

**38** A clear example of the multi-generational (heritable) nature of ties between families can be found in the last will and testament of Eustathios Boilas. Eustathios, who wrote his will from eastern Anatolia in 1059, records how he had faithfully served his "lord" (αύθέντης) Basil [Apokapes] and had continued this faithful service to Basil's two sons after his death. The document gives the impression that Eustathios had been pressured into bequeathing some of his properties to Basil's sons, strongly suggesting that such ties were not always on equal terms, even if the family of Boilas was itself relatively wealthy and powerful. See Speros Vryonis Jr., "The Will of a Provincial Magnate, Eustathius Boilas (1059)," *DOP* 11 (1957): 263–77.

## Heritable Surnames and the Politics of Reputation

Family names began to appear in Byzantium in the eighth and ninth centuries, though the practice only became firmly established over the course of the tenth.[39] By the eleventh century, nearly every aristocratic family (and many among the lesser social strata) was marked by a heritable surname. Even emperors routinely employed family names after the mid-eleventh century. The process coincided with a time of social and cultural change that seems to have resulted in a far greater degree of cohesion within aristocratic family groups than in previous centuries and a much stronger identification of the individual with their *genos*.[40] Whether heritable surnames were a cause or effect of this complex process, it was through these names that such cohesion and identity was expressed. By one scholar's estimation, by the year 1200, roughly 80% of named individuals appear with family names in surviving narrative sources, while this was true of only around 20% at the beginning of the ninth century.[41]

A whole series of information was encoded in any particular surname. The etymological roots of these names themselves offer some clues as to the kinds of information that they might contain. Many Byzantine surnames were derived from regional or geographic origins (e.g. Komnenos, Taronites), imperial titles (e.g. Doukas), or personal names or sobriquets belonging to an ancestor (e.g. Argyros, Monomachos). The coded messages contained in family names, however, were not limited to this list. Just as Kekaumenos could describe the *genos* of the Vlachs as inherently ἄπιστον ("faithless"), so too could the *genos* of the Kekaumenoi be ascribed any number of characteristics viewed as inborn.[42] A carefully maintained reputation attached to one's surname (and thus, one's *genos*) carried with it a great deal of social and political capital, and it was thus a vital concern for members of these elite families that each generation maintain and add to this reputation. Famous ancestors were increasingly glorified precisely because of this fact.[43] Every individual who bore a surname had a stake in the collective reputation associated with that name, and, at the same time, had an obligation to maintain and enhance that fame and reputation. The solidarity felt by members of the same *genos* could be considerable, and it was around the family name that this solidarity was centred.

Byzantine aristocratic families never developed close ties with a particular territory or legal jurisdiction therein in the same way that some western families did. Certainly many families were proud of their provincial origins, maintained properties

**39** Kazhdan, "The Formation of Byzantine Family Names in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries," 101.

**40** Luisa Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure, Ixe–Xie siècle: Administration impériale, société locales et rôle de l'aristocratie* (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 2017), 357. "À l'origine, la fonction du nom transmissible est donc de rendre évident le statut social acquis et de légitimer l'aspiration à jouer le rôle politique qui lui correspond, faisant appel au souvenir des exploits et du prestige des ancêtres que le nom évoque."

**41** Paul Stephenson, "The Rise of the Middle Byzantine Aristocracy and the Decline of the Imperial State," in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.

**42** Kekaumenos, 187.

**43** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 254.

there, and seem to have enjoyed a certain popularity amongst the populations of their home regions. Yet, even in cases in which a family was able to dominate certain provincial offices for multiple generations, they never wrested control of them from the emperors in Constantinople, and they never became heritable in the proper sense of the word. The strength of the emperor and the draw of the imperial bureaucracy combined with the consistent fact that imperial office and title remained among the most important markers of social status and means of acquiring wealth, even in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The concentration of political power and social elites in the city of Constantinople itself likewise drew members of the aristocracy away from their landed estates in the provinces. By the later eleventh century, palaces or other residences in the capital had become a primary means of displaying the wealth and prestige of a given family.[44] In addition, nobility never developed the kind of legal backing that would eventually appear in parts of the West. As a result, members of self-styled illustrious *genē* had to take it upon themselves to convince their peers that they belonged to the elite group of aristocratic families. This unique political situation in Byzantium meant that, at a time when noble birth was increasingly highly valued, an aristocratic *genos*'s elite status was tied up more or less entirely in its name and the combination of qualities and traits it had acquired. The push for this status became especially pronounced after the 1040s, when many senatorial titles and offices were opened up to a broader section of society, notably the merchant class.[45] For Byzantine elites, any inherited social status was linked primarily to their family name and had to be continually reproduced.

The very fact of a surname's heritability meant that the achievements, fame, and reputation of one person would be more easily reproduced with each successive generation. They tied each new generation to its ancestors much more clearly and more closely for contemporaries as much as modern prosopographers. The common practice of referring to individuals only by their surname and of naming sons after their paternal grandfather (often including both given and surnames) would have further associated younger generations with the lives and careers of their forebears. It may seem rather mundane to the modern reader, but it is not insignificant that many of our sources routinely refer to individuals by just their family name. Doing so repeatedly would serve to identify the individual's actions with their *genos* as a whole, either consciously or subconsciously, in the minds of both the author and the listener.

A good example of this phenomenon can be found in an *epithalamios logos* (wedding speech) attributed to the twelfth-century poet Theodore Prodromos. In the text,

**44** Kekaumenos, for example, describes "a certain wealthy and notable person," whose power and influence he then emphasizes by relating that he "held residences in the City [Constantinople]" (ἔχων τὰς οἰκήσεις ἐν τῇ Πόλει). See Kekaumenos, 102. Such residences might continue to be associated with a given family name, even after that family had ceased to be considered among the elite. This was the case, for example, for the well-known Palace of Botaneiates, which was still known by that name in the mid-twelfth century. See Komnene, *Alexiad*, 2.12; Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 88–89.

**45** Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Title and Income at the Byzantine Court," in *Byzantine Court Culture from 829 to 1204*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1997), 199–215.

celebrating the dual marriages of the two eldest sons of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene, the two sons each become embodiments of the Komnenos and Doukas families respectively (they bore two different surnames, Alexios Komnenos and John Doukas). Theodore praises the men by celebrating the past emperors who bore their surnames (and who were indeed their ancestors). For a considerable portion of the oration, each individual fades into the background as their respective identities become subsumed by the past and present reputation of the names that they bore. By midway through the speech, Alexios Komnenos, in a sense, is no longer Alexios, but simply τὸ Κομνηνικόν, the embodiment of the name of Komnenos.[46]

Heritable surnames were usually passed down from a father to his children, though there are numerous examples of exceptions.[47] If one's mother's family was regarded as more prestigious than that of the father, one might choose to utilize his maternal surname throughout his adult life. It was fairly common for daughters to bear their mother's surname as well. There seems always to have been a certain degree of flexibility in the use of these surnames, and the same individual could even be known by different surnames at different times, depending on the context. By the thirteenth century, it was increasingly common for members of the high aristocracy to be known by multiple surnames simultaneously, drawing on the prestige and reputations of all of them.[48]

At least from the eleventh century, women seldom, if ever, bore the surname of their husband.[49] This is in contrast to imperial offices or titles, the feminine form of which is frequently associated with the office- or title-holder's wife.[50] If they could from time to time be identified by third parties using a feminine form of their husband's family name, this was not the case on lead seals or inscriptions in which the woman's own voice might

**46** Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, 344–47: Δύο μὲν οὖν ἦστην σκῆπτρα Ῥωμαίοις ἀλλήλοις καλὸν ἀνταυγάζοντα, τὸ μὲν μικρῷ πρότερον τὸ Κομνηνικόν, τὸ δ'εὐθὺς παρὰ πόδας ἐκείνου τὸ Δουκικόν, ἄμφω εὐτυχῆ καὶ περιφανῆ καὶ κοσμικῆς ἀρετῆς οὐκ ἀνάξια, κἄτα ὥσπερ ἐκ συμφωνίας συνεληλυθέτην εἰσ ἓν πολλῷ φανότερον καὶ λαμπρότερον, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ Κομνηνοδουκικὸν καὶ παππικὸν τοῖν νυμφίοιν.

**47** Exceptions are to be expected in a system that lay outside of the realm of law. For example, the chronicle known as *Theophanes Continuatus*, composed in the mid-tenth century, suggests that the surname of Kontomytai could be transmitted to a son-in-law. See *Theophanes Continuatus*, 5.175.8–10.

**48** A particularly well-known case of such "name collecting" can be found on the grave of a fifteenth-century man who died in the Morea (the southern Peloponnese). He is recorded with the name John Tornikes Doukas Angelos Palaiologos Raoul Laskaris Philanthropenos Asan. See Angeliki Laiou, "The Byzantine Aristocracy in the Palaeologan Period: A Story of Arrested Development," *Viator* 4 (1973): 135–36.

**49** There are a few known exceptions to this general rule, especially in the centuries before the eleventh. For example, the famous widow Danielis, who supported Basil I prior to his reign, may have been named after her late husband.

**50** Eleni L. Margarou, *Τίτλοι και επαγγελματικά ονόματα γυναικών στο Βυζάντιο: Συμβολή στη μελέτη για τη θέση της γυναίκας στη βυζαντινή κοινωνία* (Thessaloniki: Centre for Byzantine Studies, 2000).

be heard.[51] During the Palaiologan period, when the accumulation of several surnames came en vogue, women do seem to have sometimes included the name of their husbands as well.[52] Nevertheless, the majority of the evidence from the late tenth through the twelfth century strongly suggests that women, even after marriage, continued to utilize their parental surname, indicating their continued identification with their natal *genos*.

Such is the case of Kale, wife of Symbatios Pakourianos. Kale and her husband are known to modern scholars primarily because of the survival of both of their wills, as well as a monastic *typikon* and a few other documents recording transactions initiated by one or both of them in the Athonite monastery of Iviron.[53] These documents, dated to the final decade of the eleventh century, offer the rare opportunity to observe the ways in which a woman identified herself in her own words, even if mediated through the use of a monastic scribe. In many modern studies, Kale (sometimes known by her monastic name, Maria) is assigned the surname "Pakouriane," the feminine form of her husband's name of Pakourianos.[54] This tendency, however, is inconsistent both with the ways in which Kale identifies herself in the surviving documents from Iviron and even with the way that her husband, Symbatios, refers to her.

In her last will and testament, dated to 1098, Kale/Maria employs only the surname Basilakina, the feminized form of her father's surname, Basilakios. Early in the text, she introduces herself as "I, Maria (the) monk, daughter of the late Basilakios *kouropalates* and Xene the monk Diabatene and still living …" It is only after mentioning her parents that Kale/Maria states that she had been the wife of "the deceased *kouropalates* kyr Symbatios Pakourianos."[55] In another document, a donation to the Iviron monastery, she is again introduced as "Kale, the legitimate daughter of the departed Basilakios *kouropalates*" and "one-time wife of Symbatios Pakourianos kouropalates."[56] Even in her husband's will, Symbatios refers to his wife only as "Kale, the legitimate daughter of the late Basilakios *kouropalates* and Zoe *kouropalatissa*."[57] Nowhere does she bear her husband's surname. At the same time, in all of these documents, Kale's parents (or, in one case, just her father) are mentioned before her husband. All of this points to the maintenance of Kale's identification with her natal kin group, her *genos*, perhaps even over and above her identity as the wife of Symbatios. The surviving *typikon* of the monastery of the Mother of God Kecharitomene displays similar tendencies. Its founder,

**51** Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," 286–87.

**52** Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," 287.

**53** J. Lefort, N. Oikonomidès, and D. Papachryssanthou, eds., *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2: *Du milieu du Xie siècles à 1204*, *Archives de l'Athos* 16 (Brussels: Peeters, 1990), no. 47, 170–83; *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, no. 44, 150–56; *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, no. 46, 167–70.

**54** For example, Timothy Dawson, "Propriety, Practicality and Pleasure: The Parameters of Women's Dress in Byzantium, A.D. 1000–1200," in *Byzantine Women: Varieties of Experience 800–1200*, ed. Lynda Garland (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 49, 51.

**55** *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, no. 187.14.

**56** *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, no. 46. The donation was completed in 1093.

**57** *Actes d'Iviron*, vol. 2, no. 44. Kale's mother, Zoe, took the monastic name Xene near the end of her life.

Eirene Doukaina, was the wife of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos. Yet, in her *typikon*, she employs only the surname Doukaina.[58]

The strength of the continued identification of an adult, married woman with her natal *genos* even had the potential to complicate or disrupt the harmony of the (conjugal) family. In fact, it may be possible to identify a certain hierarchy of interests or even of loyalties within the family. From a woman's perspective, it seems that cultural currents in the eleventh and twelfth centuries prioritized the role of mother over and above that of wife, at least in certain circumstances. As Barbara Hill has noted, "disloyalty to a husband can be justified under the rubric of acting in a child's interests, without exposing the mother to criticism. Anna Komnene explained the treachery of Maria of Alania towards [her husband] Nikephoros Botaneiates as loyalty to her son Constantine."[59] Emperor Constantine X Doukas suspected his wife, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, of remaining loyal to her natal family at the expense of his own and his designated heirs. His suspicion was so strong that he famously required her to sign an oath in which she swore to uphold the rights of his designated heirs and was precluded from associating her own blood relatives with the throne.[60] In 1143, at the time of Manuel I Komnenos's accession to the throne, his brother-in-law John Roger Dalassenos contemplated revolt, but his wife, Maria Komnene, informed her natal family of the plot and it was quashed before becoming a serious threat.[61]

Anna Komnene apparently preferred to be known by her mother's surname, Doukaina, at least in some situations. The court poet Theodore Prodromos addresses at least one poem to Anna as "Doukaina" (the feminine form of Doukas) and calls her in another "the by-word/talk of the Doukai, the wise Anna."[62] Anna's children with Nikephoros Bryennios also display an interesting variety of surnames. While their eldest son was known throughout his life as Alexios Komnenos (reminiscent of his maternal grandfather) their second son is universally known in extant sources as John Doukas, meaning he inherited his surname from his maternal grandmother.[63] This was almost certainly designed to evoke the memory of the *Caesar* John Doukas who had earned quite the reputation over the course of his illustrious career in the late eleventh century. John's (Anna's son's) own sons are known to have used the surname Komnenos,

**58** *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 649–724. The monastery was probably founded in the early twelfth century.

**59** Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 85.

**60** The full text of this oath survives and has been edited by Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Le serment de l'imperatrice Eudocie (1067)," *REB* 21 (1963): 118–19.

**61** Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 140.

**62** Eduard Kurtz, "Unedierte Texte aus der Zeit des Kaisers Johannes Komnenos," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 16 (1907): 88ff. Anna is called "τὸ Δουκικὸν θρύλλημα, τὴν σοφὴν Ἄνναν."

**63** See, for example, the poem addressed to Anna's two sons upon their marriage, usually attributed to Theodore Prodromos, which has been published by Gautier alongside Nikephoros Bryennios's *Material for History*, 340–55; Polemis, *The Doukai*, 113.

which is not surprising considering the importance that name had acquired by the later twelfth century.[64]

Despite the fact that these family names were inherited, there is some evidence for the occasional fluidity in their use. We know of several individuals who were known by alternate surnames, sometimes switching from one to another in different situations or at different stages of life. Marianos Argyros was apparently known later in life as Marianos Agambas, yet Argyros was the name carried by his descendants later in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Some sources refer to Theodotos Melissenos by the surname Kassiteras, though it was the name Melissenos that Theodotos passed on to later generations.[65] While it is not always clear whether the individuals themselves chose to utilize an alternative surname name or if these were simply assigned to them by later sources, there is some evidence that an individual could make the choice to employ an alternate surname. In these cases, the choice could often be political. In the thirteenth century, for example, Michael Doukas Tarchaneiotes, chose to use the surname Philanthropenos (of his paternal grandmother), a name that was associated with the Laskarids and, thus, distanced himself from the ruling family at the time, the Palaiologoi.[66]

Such fluidity in the use of surnames and their reputation might also lead to disputes over an individual's right to use a particular surname. John Zonaras offers some admittedly rare evidence of just such a dispute when he records that Emperor Constantine X Doukas's relation to the *genos* of the Doukai was "mixed and adulterated" because he was descended from the female member of the tenth-century Doukai.[67] Significantly, Zonaras claims that Constantine was "not considered (λελόγιστο) to be a pure Doukas," implying that it was not just the author himself who questioned Constantine X's legitimate claim to the illustrious name of Doukas.

It is common for modern scholars to highlight the relative fluidity with which Byzantine aristocrats might employ particular surnames, especially when compared with the contemporary West. The comments by Zonaras should serve as a cautionary note, however, to those who wish to see a near free-for-all amongst Byzantine aristocrats in their employment of surnames. Even if numerous examples show that individuals could and did utilize surnames inherited from their mothers or relatives other than their father, there was at least one current within Byzantine society that assigned varying levels of legitimacy to the inheritance of names through different channels.

As heritable surnames became the norm, it is not inaccurate to imagine them taking on some of the same characteristics and containing similar social and political currency as that associated with imperial titles or offices, though the latter never completely lost their significance. A large number of lead seals belonging to members of the Komnenos

**64** Polemis, *The Doukai*, 113.

**65** Stavrakas, "The Byzantine Provincial Elite," 35–36.

**66** Gounaridis, "Constitution d'une généalogie," 278.

**67** John Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories*, 18.8, lines 12–14: ἐκ θηλείας τινός … οἱ τούτου [Constantine X] κατήγοντο πρόγονοι, ὅθεν οὐδὲ Δούκας λελόγιστο καθαρός, ἀλλ'ἐπίμικτος καὶ κεκιβδηλευμένην ἔχων τὴν πρὸς τοὺς Δούκας συγγένειαν.

family in the twelfth century and later include the surname (sometimes alongside other prestigious family names), but lack any reference to an imperial title or office. As Cheynet has argued, "it is more likely that these persons regarded the very name Komnenos as the highest of titles."[68] Much like imperial offices or titles, a surname would instantly conjure a specific set of distinguishing marks and correlations in the mind of a listener or reader. The case of Michael "Ouranos" described by Skylitzes is here illustrative. The new appointee as *Doux* of Antioch not only received his new surname from the emperor, but he received it as part of the same court ceremony in which he was officially given the imperial title. It is as if Michael was receiving two separate titles from the emperor, each designed to enhance its holder's authority in its own way.

## The Manipulation of Reputation

Anyone claiming membership in an aristocratic *genos* had a duty to protect and enhance the reputation attached to their name.[69] This was a vital concern, not just for establishing a family's high social status, but also for the successful functioning of political agreements or for performing one's duties as an imperial official. According to Leonora Neville, authority (especially outside of Constantinople) "came from forging agreements between relatively independent actors … Maintaining oneself in a position of authority therefore required constant performance before the audience of potential supporters."[70]

As one well-known example of the purposeful manipulation of the reputation of certain family names, Catherine Holmes has demonstrated that the eleventh-century historian John Skylitzes was influenced in his choice to name certain individuals at key moments in his history based upon their relation to prominent contemporaries of the historian himself. Their inclusion in his history was designed, in part, to enhance the reputation of those who stood to gain from their association with people bearing the same family name who had contributed to Byzantine military victories or other important events.[71] This was almost certainly done at their explicit request. Similar concerns influenced Nikephoros Bryennios's early twelfth-century *Material for History*.[72] Perhaps the best evidence of

**68** Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Official Power and Non-Official Power," in *Fifty Years of Prosopography: The Later Roman Empire, Byzantium and Beyond*, Proceedings of the British Academy 118, ed. Averil Cameron (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137–50, esp. 139.

**69** Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 34: "Mit der Verwendung von Familiennamen einher geht das Phänomen Namen zu bewerten und nach wohlklingenden Namen zu streben."

**70** Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society*, 149.

**71** Catherine Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire (976–1025)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 202–10.

**72** Leonora Neville, "Families, Politics, and Memories of Rome in the *Material for History* of Nikephoros Bryennios," in *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Shaun Tougher (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 359–70; Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

this practice comes from a history that was never completed at all. John Mauropous, who flourished as a court intellectual during the reign of Constantine IX Monomachos, composed a poem entitled "When he gave up writing his chronicle." The poem, which survives as number 96 in his collection, describes how Mauropous had given up on his project because of excessive pressure from his patrons to praise their good names. "Even if the book would indulge in their praises," he writes, "they would still think it falls short of them. Power is always hungry for more applause. Therefore, let these praises be assigned to panegyrics, and let the chronicle not proceed any further."[73]

A number of written narratives or pamphlets designed to enhance the reputation of specific individuals and their families at one time circulated within aristocratic circles. Traces of one or more pro-Phokas family narratives seem to have made their way into the histories of Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes.[74] Attaleiates's comment that he had learned about the link between the Phokas family and the ancient Roman Fabii "from a certain old book" could perhaps be taken as evidence of an independent Phokas family history as well.[75] Skylitzes himself attests to the existence of a work "in eight books" dedicated to the tenth-century general John Kourkouas, made famous for his victories against Muslim armies in the east.[76] The eleventh-century general George Maniakes was probably the subject of a work designed to glorify his actions and to denounce his political rivals.[77] Neville has convincingly argued that a history glorifying the *Caesar* John Doukas was used by Nikephoros Bryennios in the twelfth century.[78] Peter Frankopan has likewise argued that a similar narrative celebrating George Palaiologos and his family was used by Anna Komnene in her *Alexiad*.[79] Though none of them survive today, extant sources suggest that these pamphlets probably focused on the praise of an individual or family (especially for martial prowess) and, sometimes, the denunciation of rivals. Even praise of the individual, however, would probably have included a mention of the

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**73** John Mauropous, *Poems*, no. 96, ed. and trans. Floris Bernard and Christopher Livanos, *The Poems of Christopher of Mytilene and John Mauropous*, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 50 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 512–13: ὧν τοῖς ἐπαίνοις ἐντρυφῶν τὸ βιβλίον, ὅμως ἔδοξεν ἐνδεέστερον λέγειν· ἐξουσία κρότων γὰρ οὐκ οἶδε[ν] κόρον. Οὐκουν ἀφείσθω ταῦτα τοῖς ἐγκωμίοις, ἡ συγγραφὴ δὲ μὴ προχωρείτω πλέον.

**74** Jakov N. Ljubarskij, "Nikephoros Phokas in Byzantine Historical Writings: Trace of the Secular Biography in Byzantium," *Byzantinoslavica* 54 (1993): 245–53; Leo the Deacon, *History*, trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 14–15.

**75** Attaleiates, *History*, 27.8, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 396–97.

**76** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 230, trans. Wortley, 222.

**77** Jonathan Shepard, "Byzantium's Last Sicilian Expedition: Scylitzes' Testimony," *Rivista di studi bisantini e neoellenici* 14–16 (1977–79): 154.

**78** Leonora Neville, "A History of the Caesar John Doukas in Nikephoros Bryennios' *Material for History?*," *BMGS* 32 (2008): 168–88.

**79** Peter Frankopan, "Aristocratic Family Narratives in Twelfth-century Byzantium," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 317–35.

individual's illustrious ancestry and praise for other members of the subject's family.[80] The content of these lost works may even have resembled the histories of Genesios and Theophanes, whose works were designed to praise the reigning Macedonian dynasty.[81] Similarities might also be sought in Armenian histories of individual princely families like Thomas Arcruni's tenth-century *History of the House of Arcrunik'*.[82]

The so-called *Vita Basilii*, the tenth-century work that attempts to link Emperor Basil I with a relative of Constantine I and the Arsakid dynasty of ancient Parthia and Armenia, contains little information about Basil's more recent ancestors, even his parents.[83] The historical memory displayed in "genealogies" like these rarely extends beyond two or three generations. Glorification of ancestors and the historical memory of these families is more concerned with the attainment of glory and prestige by living individuals by linking them with famous ancestors than it is with maintaining a degree of memory of one's ancestors for its own sake.

The account preserved in the *History* of Michael Attaleiates that purports to trace the heroic deeds and illustrious ancestry of Nikephoros III Botaneiates through the Phokades and the ancient Roman Fabii, often misleadingly called a "genealogy," only vaguely presents the genealogical link between them and Botaneiates.[84] Attaleiates dedicated his *History* to Emperor Nikephoros III, so it is not immediately surprising that the author would try to link his hero's genealogy to one of the most distinguished families of an earlier period. This is not, however, the only known link between Botaneiates and the name of Phokas. There exists a letter, summarized by Michael Psellos in his *Chronographia*, which was apparently sent from Emperor Michael VII Doukas to Botaneiates when the latter was attempting to usurp the throne.[85] Rather than being "to Nikephoros Botaneiates," the letter is simply addressed to "Phokas," and Botaneiates

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**80** Praising an individual's family was an important part of any encomium, or speech of praise. See Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 415–16.

**81** Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography after Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 46–47.

**82** The fact that families like the Kourkouai were known to have Armenian roots and their geographic proximity to the Armenian cultural sphere could even have allowed for the more direct influence of or borrowing from the Armenian literary tradition in some of these family histories or narratives. See Tim Greenwood, "Basil I, Constantine VII and Armenian Literary Tradition in Byzantium," in *Reading in the Byzantine Empire and Beyond*, ed. Teresa Shawcross and Ida Toth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 447–66.

**83** The *Vita Basilii* is typically included as Book Five of the history known as *Theophanes Continuatus*, which was written during the reign of Basil's grandson, Constantine VII (913–59).

**84** Attaleiates, *History*, 27.9ff, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 398ff.

**85** The letter, in an abridged form, is preserved at the very end of Michael Psellos's *Chronographia*. It should be noted that Diether Reinsch, following Ljubarskij, suggests that this letter may actually belong to the reign of Basil II and his fight against the rebel Bardas Phokas. If this is the case, the letter may have been placed at the end of Psellos' *Chronographia* by a later redactor. Reinsch's comments are made in his recent edition of Psellos, *Chronographia*, 862n320; Jakov Ljubarskij, "Der Brief des Kaisers an Phokas," *JÖB* 26 (1977): 103–7.

is referred to as "Phokas" several times.[86] When read next to Attaleiates, Psellos's letter suggests that Botaneiates himself was actively promoting his links to the *genos* of the Phokades. This may not only have tied him to members of the tenth-century Phokas family, it may also have associated him with an existing faction that still held favourable memories of or marriage alliances with the Phokades.

In the second half of the tenth century, the name Phokas was nearly synonymous with nobility and socio-political success. Several families claimed kinship with them even almost a century after the Phokades themselves had largely disappeared from the historical record.[87] The twelfth-century historian Nikephoros Bryennios, for example, records how Maria of Bulgaria, wife of Andronikos Doukas, "Traced her ancestry (γένος) on her father's side to Samuel, king of Bulgaria … and on her mother's side, to the Kontostephanoi, the Aballantes, and the Phokades, who were previously very famous (περιφανεστάτους) and adorned with much wealth."[88] The family name had suffered a decline in its standing in the mid-eleventh century, due largely to their association with rebellions against the throne of Basil II, but they were seemingly rehabilitated by the beginning of the twelfth century.[89]

Among the *genē* apparently most capable of developing and maintaining name recognition were the Doukai. Nikephoros Bryennios, husband of Anna Komnene and author of *Material of History*, records that the first "bearer of the name Doukas" was "related by blood" to Emperor Constantine the Great and had accompanied him in his move from old to new Rome, but there is no attempt to trace the lineage from this mysterious ancestor to the Doukai of his own day.[90] The family name of Doukas even made it into at least two works of fiction emanating from the Constantinopolitan court in the twelfth century. In the "epic" tale *Digenes Akrites*, the protagonist's mother (and in one version, his wife) is said to be a descendant of the Doukai.[91] The hero of the *Timarion* is likewise described as a descendant of the famous family on his mother's side.[92] The notion that the Doukai originated in Italy at the time of Emperor Constantine I also made its way into this fictional tale.[93] In one oration dedicated to Eirene Doukaina, Michael Italikos even goes so

**86** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.18.

**87** Stephenson, "A Development in Nomenclature," 196.

**88** Bryennios, *Material for History*, 3.6, 219.

**89** Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Les Phocas," in *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas*, ed. and trans. Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihaescu (Paris: Editions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1986), 315.

**90** Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, Proem. 9.

**91** *Digenes Akrites* G1.262–4, 4.43, 4.304.

**92** For an analysis of the *Timarion* as a satirical critique of the Byzantine aristocracy, see Margaret Alexiou, "Literary Subversion and the Aristocracy in Twelfth Century Byzantium: A Stylistic Analysis of the *Timarion* (Ch. 6–10)," *BMGS* 8 (1983): 29–45; Dimitris Krallis, "Harmless Satire, Stinging Critique: Notes and Suggestions for Reading the *Timarion*," in *Power and Subversion in Byzantium. Papers from the Forty-third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 2010*, ed. Dimiter Angelov and Michael Saxby (Farnham: Routledge, 2013), 221–46.

**93** *Timarion*, 221.

far as to claim that the Doukai could trace their beginnings with Zeus.[94] Scholars have long disagreed about the potential agency of living members of the Doukas family in their family's name appearance in such works, but it remains significant that the name made its way into these works as synonymous for nobility and elite ancestry.[95]

A family's reputation might ebb and flow at various times among various audiences, and even the most prominent family could run the real risk of losing its "nobility" altogether. In one of his many works, Eustathios of Thessaloniki names several individuals and families who were opposed to the rule of Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183–1185). Among those listed as "not at all well-born" (οὐ μὴν δὲ ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν εὐγενείας ἐπιτεταγμένων) is "a certain Maleïnos," as well as "a certain Dalasenos."[96] The Maleïnoi intermarried with the Phokades in the tenth century and were ranked among the most powerful, and recognizable, families within the Anatolian aristocracy. As for the Dalas(s)enoi, Alexios I Komnenos's own mother carried the name. It seems both families had suffered a precipitous decline in reputation by the 1180s. In these cases, Kekaumenos's fears of ruin and descent into obscurity seem to have been realized. Reputations could be lost as (or even more) easily as they might be built.

## The Evidence of Lead Seals

Lead seals, used to seal important correspondence sent by various imperial or patriarchal officials, offered the user an ideal medium through which one could advertise their membership in a particular *genos* and, therefore, their participation in the reputation of that *genos*. Paul Stephenson has argued that the earliest appearance of heritable surnames on lead seals, which occurred in the final decades of the tenth century, was directly linked to the desire of individuals (in his case, Bardas Skleros) to advertise their *genos* to those with whom they corresponded, often in their attempts to forge alliances with other aristocratic families or factions in a time of political upheaval.[97]

While the exact relationship between the owner of a seal and the composer of the epigrammatic verses found thereon is not always known, the words depicted can generally be considered those of the owner. Even if there was an intermediary between the owner and the actual production of the epigram, it would be the owner who had the final say in the inscription's content. There is also evidence that many elites were fully

**94** Italikos, *Letters and Orations*, *Ep*. 13.19–24; Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 43.

**95** See, for example, Roderick Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion," in *Alexios I Komnenos: Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe, vol. 1: *Papers* (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 329–38.

**96** Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsention der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 32n27. The text is taken from Eustathios's homily on the sack of Thessaloniki at the hands of the Normans of Sicily.

**97** Stephenson, "A Development in Nomenclature."

capable of composing poetic verse on their own.[98] Whatever interpretive problems lead seals and their inscriptions might present, it is most certainly true that they offer better evidence for the self-description and self-representation of individuals than most other media, written or otherwise.[99]

From their earliest attestation, lead seals typically bore their holder's office and/or imperial dignity (ἀξίαι διὰ βραβείων), since it was through their office and title that the individuals derived their authority. Personal names and images (typically religious) not only gave the seals a personal touch but also designated them as specific to that one individual. The addition of surnames beginning in the late tenth or early eleventh century could serve both of these functions. That is, a heritable surname could serve not only to differentiate the individual bearer of the seal, it could also serve as an enhancement to that individual's claim to some kind of authority, inasmuch as his effective authority could rest, in part, on his social status and his reputation among his peers or subordinates. According to Stephenson, "the practice was itself an expression of the ideology of *eugeneia* which was consciously cultivated to promote the image of a particular clan either in competition with rival *genē*, or to promote a sense of common interest between communicating allies."[100]

Beginning sometime in the eleventh century, many owners began inscribing short poetic verses on their seals, sometimes in place of the more usual image of a saint.[101] A badly damaged seal from one John Doukas demonstrates the same kind of poetic language used to refer to the Doukas family in several different sources, particularly court poetry (e.g. the oration celebrating the marriage of Anna Komnene's two sons, Alexios Komnenos and John Doukas).[102] The decision to include surnames and sometimes even lengthier descriptions of the holder's kinship with emperors or other notable

**98** For example, Isaac Komnenos, in his twelfth-century *typikon* for the Kosmosoteira monastery, states that he donated to the monks "another book … that I composed with great effort. It [contains] heroic, iambic, and political verse, as well as various letters and *ekphraseis*." See *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 2, 844, §106.

**99** Anthony Bryer, Archibald Dunn, and John W. Nesbitt, "Theodore Gabras, Duke of Chaldia († 1098) and the Gabrades," in *Byzantium—State and Society: In Memory of Nikos Oikonomides*, ed. Anna Avramea et al. (Athens: National Hellenic Foundation, Center for Byzantine Studies, 2003), 52.

**100** Stephenson, "A Development in Nomenclature," 209.

**101** In general, see Laurent, *Les bulles métriques*; Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsentation der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 46–51; Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*.

**102** Vitalien Laurent, ed., *Documents de sigillographhie byzantine*: *La collection C. Orghidan* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952), no. 428. The inscription covers both sides (though large portions are missing or destroyed): [Σφραγὶς πέφυκα] [τ]ῶν γρα[φ]ῶν Ἰω(άννου) δουκι[κῆς] ῥίζης [κλά]δου; cf. Theodore Prodromos's oration on John Doukas' marriage (published in Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, 345): καὶ σὺ δέ, ὁ τῆς Δουκικῆς ῥίζης ὄρπηξ. In fact, it is possible that the seal belonged to the same John Doukas mentioned in this poem, though this is little more than conjecture.

individuals is particularly significant considering the small size of most such seals (typically around 20 mm in diameter).

By the late twelfth century, seals bearing poetic inscriptions describing their owners' family backgrounds become increasingly common and precise in the information they convey. So, for instance, one seal dated to the twelfth century and belonging to John Manganes, *sebastos*, records that the *genos* of Manganes "has roots in Rome," showing precisely the kind of geographical memory described above.[103] Another example comes from a late twelfth-century seal in the Vatican collection whose owner is identified as "Alexios, of the *genos* Branas on his father's side, scion of the root of the Komnenoi on his mother's."[104] The seal gives two surnames, and Alexios specifies from which side of the family he has inherited each one. The botanic language and the "foundation of the *genos*" (γεναρχία) is familiar to many forms of literature of the same period. Similar language is found on a late twelfth-century seal containing the following inscription: "I authorize the writings of Alexios, scion [lit. 'sapling'] of the Doukai, the Komnenoi, [and] the Angeloi."[105] Some seals might even bear a family marker different from the surname most often associated with an individual. For example, a seal belonging Gregory Pahlavuni, an Armenian "man of letters," chose to emphasize his genealogical links to the Arsakid dynasty of Armenia without including his more usual surname.[106]

One late eleventh- or early twelfth-century seal of John Komnenos serves as an early example of an individual specifying not only his *genos*/surname on his seal, but going a step further, noting that the holder was also the "son of the *sebastokrator*," a title created by Alexios Komnenos to honour his brother, Isaac.[107] A seal belonging to Michael Taronites describes him as the *gambros* (brother-in-law) of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos,[108] while another from the twelfth century displays an inscription identifying its owner, the Grand

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**103** *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 5, no. 109.1 (Fogg 413). The inscription, on the reverse, reads: Σφρ[α]γὶς σεβαστ[οῦ] Μαγκά[ν]ους Ἰω(άννου) ῥίζαν γένους ἔχοντο[ς] ἑξόχου Ῥώμης.

**104** Vitalien Laurent, ed., *Les sceaux byzantins du médailler Vatican* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1962), no. 64. The inscription reads (in part): Βρανᾶ μὲν ἑκ πατρὸς γεναρχίας, ῥίζην δὲ μητρὸς Κομνηνοβλάστου κλάδου.

**105** Polemis, *The Doukai*, 88; Laurent, *Les bulles métriques*, 42–3, no. 114: Ἐγὼ κρατύνω τὰς γραφὰς Ἀλεχίου Δουκῶν Κομνηνῶν Ἀγγελωνύμων κλάδου. Polemis argues that it could be the same person as the Alexios Komnenos, son of the John Doukas who Niketas Choniates mentions was blinded by Andronikos.

**106** DO 55.1.2940. *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), vol. 4, 169. The inscription is spread over both sides: [Κ(ύρι)]ε βο(ή)θ(ει) [τῷ] σῷ δούλ(ῳ) [Γ]ρηγ(ορίῳ) μαγίστ[ρ(ῳ)], ἐπὶ τοῦ κοιτῶν(ος), δουκ[ὶ] Βαασπρακ(ανίας) (καὶ) τοῦ Ταρὼν τῷ Ἀρσακ(ί)δ(ῃ).

**107** DO 55.1.2988, 55.1.2989; Fogg 1595. *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 1, no. 12.3, 41. The inscription reads: Κ(ύρι)ε [βο(ή)]θ(ει) τῷ σῷ δούλῳ Ἰω(άννῃ) Κομνηνῷ κὲ δουκὶ Δυρραχίου τῷ υ<ἱ>ῷ τοῦ σεβαστοκράτορ[ο]ς.

**108** DO 58.106.5634. Nicolas Oikonomidès, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals*, no. 101, 98. Dated by the editor to sometime between 1081–94, the inscription on both sides reads: Γραφὰς

Duke Michael, as "husband of the empress's sister Theodora" ([αύγουσ]ταδέλ[φης] [σ]υζύγου [Θεοδ]ώρας).[109]

A notable eleventh-century seal belonging to Niketas "Neos" Xylinites, *sebastophoros* and *strategos* of Samos offers evidence of both the strength of surnames in associating individuals with their family group and the potential for the amalgamation of two or more individuals in public thought.[110] In Byzantium, *neos* (lit. "new, young") usually indicates "the Second" (such as Emperor Basil II) or "the Younger." This Niketas, while including his surname, has gone to certain lengths to differentiate himself from a previous holder of the same post, perhaps his own grandfather, while simultaneously linking himself with the rest of his family and the family with this office.

Béatrice Caseau has argued that the family of Xeros, an aristocratic family known from at least the tenth century, had a particular attachment to St. Mark as evidenced by the frequent appearance of the saint on their lead seals from the eleventh century onward.[111] Aside from Mark's association with Alexandria (and Egypt as a whole) and Venice, the saint is rarely included in the iconography of Byzantine seals, especially after the fall of Alexandria to Muslim forces in the seventh century. Several other prominent families are known to have favoured a particular saint on their own seals over the period of several generations, showing a certain family solidarity in their iconographic choice and, according to Caseau, the creation of something approaching a "family tradition." There are, however, several problems with this theory.

While Mark makes frequent appearances on the seals of the Xeroi, he is not the only saint to appear on their seals. Personal attachments to particular saints, often based on an individual's baptismal name, obviously continued to influence individual decisions about the decoration of their personal seals. And though St. Mark may be a relatively unique saint to whom to dedicate one's seal, and thus may have helped to identify the seal as belonging to a member of the Xeros family, many of the other known cases in which a given family displays a propensity to include the same saint's image on several of its members' seals, involve much more common saints (e.g. the Doukai frequently employed an image of Mary the Theotokos, while the Monomachoi claimed an attachment to St. George). Thus, while there may have been a family tradition that influenced the decision to include a particular saint on one's seal, it would not have had the same

σφραγίζω Μιχαὴλ Τα[ρ]ωνίτ[ο]υ γαμβροῦ μεγίστου δεσ[π]ότου Ἀλεξί[ου]. Michael is known to have married Maria, sister of Alexios I Komnenos.

**109** Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du médailler Vatican*, no. 79. This Michael is identified by Laurent as Michael Stryphnos, husband of Theodora, who was the sister of Empress Euphrosyne Doukaina Kamaterina, wife of Alexios III Komnenos (Angelos) (r. 1195–1203).

**110** DO 58.106.5516. *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 2, no. 44.8, 133. The inscription, on the reverse, reads, Σφραγ(ὶς) Νικήτα σεβαστ(ο)φόρ(ου) πέλω Σάμου στρατηγοῦ τοῦ Νέου Ξυλινίτ(ου).

**111** Béatrice Caseau, "Saint Mark, A Family Saint? The Iconography of the Xeroi Seals" in *Epeironde: Proceedings of the 10th International Symposium of Byzantine Sigillography (Ioannina, 1.–3. October 2009*), ed. Christos Stavrakos and Barbara Papadopoulou (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2011), 81–109.

effect as family heraldry in the medieval West. It would be impossible to argue that the Doukas family ever achieved a kind of monopoly on images of the Theotokos on their lead seals, or that an image of St. George would have immediately conjured images of the Monomachos family in the late eleventh century.

The growing frequency in the appearance of surnames from the late tenth and eleventh centuries and the increasing amount of detail given regarding an individual's relation to particular *genos* (including the use of the term *genos* itself) on lead seals reflects contemporary practices found in other written sources. While, histories and chronicles written in the mid-tenth century only give surnames for a fraction of the characters introduced into the narrative, those of the later eleventh and twelfth appear much more concerned with each of their characters' family background, often giving the reader not only a surname but also a brief commentary on various qualities associated with that family or notable ancestors. The kind of aristocratic kin group represented by the *genos* or its synonyms makes infrequent appearances before the eleventh century and, even then, the vocabulary for this kind of kin group is inconsistent, suggesting that the authors are perhaps unsure of how to describe them. By the turn of the twelfth century, not only had the vocabulary of the *genos* become solidified, but an entire repertoire of stock phrases and tropes used to describe these aristocratic *genē* clearly took shape, drawing especially from older language for ethnicity and royal/imperial dynasties.

When an individual chose to include his/her family name on their lead seals, they were not only drawing upon the prestige of that name to enhance their own authority, they were also associating their individual actions with their *genos* as a collective whole. In this way, they were contributing to the family's reputation as much as utilizing any existing one.

## Conclusion

Social status based largely on individual and family reputation presupposes an audience in whose eyes that reputation is upheld. Kekaumenos's advice does not centre upon an internalized system of honour, but on the development and maintenance of a reputation among others.[112] Paul Magdalino has argued for the importance of one's *patris* (local community) in *Advice and Anecdotes*.[113] According to Magdalino, Kekaumenos was less concerned about disseminating his family's reputation among peers who supposedly

**112** In this, Kekaumenos's idea of reputation is similar to the concept of *fama* found in the medieval West. See Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail, "Introduction," in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 4.

**113** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 213. In Kekaumenos, "the social group in whose eyes honour is sought is not merely the *oikos* or the *genos*, nor even the sum of two rival *oikoi* or *gene*, but a local community—a *patris* … The *patris* thus emerges in its own right and in a way which is conspicuously missing in the world of *Digenes*." The term *patris* simply means "fatherland" or "homeland," and can denote either a local community, a region of the empire, or the empire as a whole.

"knew each other too well to need to advertise their ancestry."[114] This argument, however, ignores the competition for reputation within the aristocracy of the late eleventh century. Histories like those composed by Attaleiates or Skylitzes were primarily designed to be read (or heard) by members of the aristocracy, not the semi-literate peasantry. The simple fact that much of the evidence for the deliberate attempts of elite families to enhance their reputation come in the form of praise in narrative histories, poetry, or other forms of literature produced in the tenth and eleventh centuries indicates that the information was circulating among a fairly limited, aristocratic milieu.

Lead seals, other epigrammatic poetry, and visual media (e.g. wall paintings) complicate the picture. A much broader spectrum of social classes would have had at least some access to these alternative forms, all of which were used extensively by members of aristocratic *genē* to glorify and enhance their family's reputation. Certainly wall paintings could reach a very broad audience. The group of paintings in the monastery of George Palaiologos are a case in point. The images of the various emperors with whom George was claiming some connection would have been immediately recognizable.[115] A viewer would likely have been able to associate these emperors with the monastery's founder and patron, even if their precise nature remained unclear. Unfortunately, a large portion of surviving lead seals exist divorced from their context, that is, without the document(s) to which they were originally attached. Without this information, it can be difficult to surmise exactly who would have seen them and, presumably, read the inscriptions thereon. The relatively incomplete state of modern knowledge concerning literacy in Byzantium also creates difficulties when trying to assess the relative proportion of individuals outside of the social elites who would have understood dedicatory inscriptions or other forms of writing inscribed or painted on various structures throughout Constantinople and in the provinces.

In a military context, a general's reputation and that of his family could matter a great deal in securing the loyalty of his troops. The various military engagements and, especially, civil wars in the tenth and eleventh centuries appear in our sources in such a way that it quickly becomes clear that one's home region, that is *patris*, was instrumental in determining an individual soldier's loyalties and motivations for risking his life. A soldier from Cappadocia seems to have been more inclined to fight for a Cappadocian general than even an emperor, even if this meant fighting against the imperial army. Beyond this, it was also important that a general garner the love and respect of his troops through things like the development of a reputation for martial prowess (victories were naturally vital), generosity in distributing booty/pay, or even what one might call a "soldierly lifestyle." These would typically be traits associated with an individual, of course, but one's family background was not irrelevant, even here.

Emperor Michael V quickly learned the power of the Constantinopolitan populace when he attempted to banish his adoptive mother, the Empress Zoe. Within little more than twenty-four hours, the consequent tumult created by residents of the city forced

**114** Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 202.

**115** Oikonomidès, "Pictorial Propaganda in XIIth c. Constantinople," 93–102.

the emperor to recall Zoe from exile, who then forced Michael to abdicate the throne.[116] The episode is a testament to the success of the Macedonian dynasty's efforts to legitimize their rule, in part by linking its founder, Basil I, to Constantine I and the Arsakids. Recent work by Anthony Kaldellis has further demonstrated the real power, indeed the sovereignty, of the Byzantine populace (especially in Constantinople).[117] Emperors, more than anyone, had to maintain their reputation among the people. Their throne, and often their lives, depended on it. Thus, while others within the aristocracy seem to have been the primary targets of deliberate enhancement of an elite family's name, popular support, especially in and around Constantinople, may have been one of the most important factors in securing the imperial throne, especially after the mid-eleventh century.[118]

Byzantine elites of the twelfth century and later exhibited an eagerness to display several of the surnames they could boast as part of their ancestry, surnames that had been imbued with meaning through generations. The process that led to this phenomenon was a gradual one, and one that was only possible because of such developments as heritable surnames and a stronger individual identification with their family group. At the same time, Byzantine sources display a growing willingness to define individuals primarily based upon their ancestry and their family connections. The appearance of heritable surnames coincided with the development of the *genos* as a distinct form of kin group in Byzantium, and the two were always inextricably linked. A *genos*'s singular identity was to a large extent based around the name itself.

Heritable surnames functioned in many ways similarly to imperial offices or titles, though with at least two important differences. Firstly, these family names were inherited by birth. Imperial titles and offices never became the personal property of individual families, no matter how weak the imperial government in Byzantium became. It seems to have been this very notion of heritability that endeared the notion of surnames as markers of status to those members of the aristocracy who, especially in the eleventh century, worked to differentiate themselves from *nouveaux riches* by emphasizing their families' ancient nobility. Though aristocratic families were largely dependent upon the perception of the qualities of their family name by others, surnames were one source of authority over which the families might hope to exert some degree of control relatively independent of imperial interference. Byzantine elites typically owned land spread throughout various regions of the empire, and the emperor could confiscate these lands on a whim. In this way, it is perhaps not too far-fetched to describe heritable surnames among the Byzantine elite as, in the words of Cheynet, "patrimoine familial."[119]

Second, while the authority of imperial offices and titles was more or less guaranteed by the imperial government, that derived from the prestige of the family name could be

**116** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 5.25–51.

**117** Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 139–40.

**118** Anthony Kaldellis, "How to Usurp the Throne in Byzantium: The Role of Public Opinion in Sedition and Rebellion." In *Power and Subversion in Byzantium*, ed. Dimiter Angelov and Michael Saxby (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 43–56.

**119** Cheynet, "L'anthroponymie aristocratique à Byzance," 287.

much more ephemeral and relied on the ability of individuals bearing a given name to convince their peers and subordinates that their name conferred upon them the very social status they desired. The prestige and authority derived from a surname was only as powerful as it was perceived to be by others, and aristocratic families in tenth- and eleventh-century Byzantium could not rely on the state or any other authority to guarantee their surname's efficacy. This they were solely responsible for. It also meant that such status as had been painstakingly accrued over several generations could be lost in an instant in the event of some catastrophic incident such as an embarrassing military defeat, a failed usurpation of the throne, or the confiscation of their property by the emperor. Families might equally benefit from or fall victim to the ever-changing characteristics associated with their name as it circulated in various circles independent of the family's own attempts to manipulate their reputation. Such, after all, is the very nature of rumour and reputation.

Chapter 6

# KINSHIP AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH CENTURIES

> Ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ ἂν ψεύσαιμι τὰς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον συνθήκας ἀλλ'εὐμενὴς καὶ φιλάνθ ρωπος ἔσομαι, πατήρ τε τοῖς νέοις καὶ τοῖς ἥλιξιν ἀδελφὸς καὶ βακτηρία τοῖς γέρουσι καὶ παῖς τῇ διαθέσει καὶ μιμήσει τῆς φύσεως.
>
> I will not prove false in my contract with him [God], but will be kind and compassionate, a father to the young, a brother to those my age, a cane to the elderly and like a son to them in disposition and in imitation of nature.
>
> Words spoken by Emperor Constantine X Doukas upon taking the throne[1]

THE DEVELOPMENT OF the aristocratic *genos* in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was intimately connected with contemporary politics, especially at the highest level. The influence of emperors or empresses was felt primarily in two ways. First, elite families in Byzantium were never completely independent from imperial influence. Throughout the period covered here (and beyond), imperial office and title, alongside the support of the imperial throne, continued to play a decisive role in determining the fortunes of aristocratic families.[2] The Byzantine aristocracy remained an aristocracy of imperial office-holders. Second, the changing of imperial dynasties and the nature of imperial legitimization had a tangible effect on the rest of the Byzantine aristocracy. After the end of the Macedonian dynasty in 1056, emperors were forced to find alternative methods of legitimizing their rule. One method was through the "nobility" or "illustriousness" of their family lines, a fact that reverberated throughout the rest of high society. The period between 1056 and 1081 was one of instability in imperial politics, but it was simultaneously a time of heightened concern among the elite regarding family cohesion and identity. The dynasty founded by Alexios I Komnenos in 1081 would in turn harness this development within the imperial government itself, morphing the *genos* into a centripetal, rather than a centrifugal force.

The imperial government has predictably remained a central focus in modern scholarship. As Michael Angold argues, contradictory assessments of the eleventh and twelfth centuries typically hinge upon the "effectiveness of the state."[3] For Ostrogorsky, the weakening of the central government at the expense of the growth of power and influence of

**1** Attaleiates, *History*, 13.2, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 129.

**2** Anthony Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood: The Rise and Fall of Byzantium, 955 A.D. to the First Crusade* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2–9.

**3** Michael Angold, "Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 585.

"feudal lords" caused the empire's decline over eleventh century.[4] Lemerle disagreed, seeing the eleventh century as period of economic and cultural growth, despite military setbacks in Anatolia.[5] For him, it was the Komnenoi who ensured the eventual collapse of the empire. Yet even Lemerle saw semi-feudal kinship networks as undermining the administrative state. Kazhdan thought a reactionary government trying to suppress the rise of powerful estates was at least partially responsible for failures within the empire,[6] while Alan Harvey argues that the rise of the great estate was necessary to economic and social life of Byzantium in this period.[7]

Many of these models and arguments closely parallel analyses of the medieval West, especially of the medieval German lands. Explanations for why Germany failed to emerge as a unifed nation-state like France or England (Germany's *Sonderweg*) have often been sought in the rise of family loyalties and power at the expense of the monarchy.[8] Like the modern historiography covering the Byzantine Empire, the mid-eleventh century is typically viewed as a key period of change. The widespread practice of partible inheritance among German princely lineages has also played a significant role in these arguments, yet another aspect shared with Byzantium.[9] More recent work has generally moved away from this teleological focus on the *Sonderweg*, but narratives and studies of the German lands in the eleventh and twelfth centuries continue to display many similarities with those of the Byzantine Empire in the same era.[10] Both fields could benefit from increased communication and interaction.

Interpretations of Byzantium in this period depend as much on one's view of the growth of powerful, largely independent aristocracy as on the development of the imperial government. Those families whose "great estates" and relationships with the emperor lie at the centre of these discourses are largely the same ones who shaped

**4** Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*; Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*.

**5** Paul Lemerle, *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin* (Paris: Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1977), 249–312.

**6** Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 242–55.

**7** Alan Harvey, *Economic Expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 35–79.

**8** For an assessment of this scholarship, see Timothy Reuter, "The Medieval German *Sonderweg*? The Empire and its Rulers in the High Middle Ages," in *Medieval Polities and Modern Mentalities*, ed. Janet L. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 388–412.

**9** Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters*, 34–41; Karl-Heinz Spieß, "Lordship, Kinship, and Inheritance among the High German Nobility in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period," in *Kinship in Europe: Approaches to Long-term Development (1300–1900)*, ed. David Warren Sabean, Simon Teuscher, and John Mathieu (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 57–75. For an older view, see James Westfall Thompson, *Feudal Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928), esp. 287–89, 303–21.

**10** For example, Benjamin Arnold, *Medieval Germany, 500–1300: A Political Interpretation* (London: Palgrave, 1997); Benjamin Arnold, *Power and Property in Medieval Germany: Economic and Social Change c.900–1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters*.

and were in turn shaped by the development of a clear sense of the aristocratic *genos* and its significance. For this reason, the following chapter offers a brief overview of imperial politics between the end of the tenth and the beginning of the thirteenth century, with a particular focus on the relationship between imperial politics and elite Byzantine families.[11]

## Ca. 900–1028: The Anatolian Aristocracy

From at least the early ninth century until the middle of the eleventh, the heart of the Byzantine aristocracy lay in central and eastern Anatolia. It was here, in regions like Paphlagonia and Cappadocia, that many of the great families who would come to dominate both the politics and, to a certain extent, culture of the empire rose to power.[12] In part, this was no doubt due to these regions' distance from Constantinople, which allowed families like the Doukai, Skleroi, Kourkouai, Phokades, and Maleïnoi to develop significant landed estates and local influence partially independent from central, imperial control. At the same time, it was support from the imperial government that generally raised such families to the status of truly significant players. Despite instances of opposition and periods of open rebellion, the Anatolian aristocracy worked largely in coordination with the central government, which was a way for the emperor in Constantinople to exert some level of control in these distant regions.[13] In turn, this imperial support benefitted these Anatolian families through honours, titles, and administrative positions, especially within the military.

By the mid-tenth century, much of the Anatolian aristocracy was effectively divided into two camps, one led by the Phokas-Maleïnos families and another represented by the families of Skleros and Kourkouas, among others.[14] Throughout the century, the leading families of the empire largely belonged to one of two opposing blocs. The parties were generally linked through ties of blood and marriage, though the lines dividing them were by no means impassable to such bonds, and the precise nature and components of either group were in a constant state of flux, subject as they were to political circumstance and opportunity.[15]

Though the century was dominated by the Macedonian dynasty founded by Basil I in 867, the young age of both Constantine VII and Basil II at the time of their imperial accession meant that several other families were represented on the imperial throne, typically acting as regents. These included Romanos I Lekapenos (r. 920–944), Nikephoros

**11** For more detailed analyses, see Michael Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025–1204: A Political History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Longman, 1997); Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*.

**12** For the earlier period, see Vlysidou, *Αριστοκρατικές οικογένειες καί εξουσία*.

**13** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*; Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*; Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society*.

**14** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 476–77.

**15** On the bipartite division of the Byzantine aristocracy in Anatolia in the ninth and early tenth centuries, see Vlysidou, *Αριστοκρατικές οικογένειες καί εξουσία*.

II Phokas (r. 963–969), and John I Tzimiskes (r. 969–976), all of whom stemmed from important families within the Anatolian aristocracy. None of these emperors succeeded in replacing the entrenched Macedonians, whose line would only end due to a lack of legitimate heirs at the death of Empress Theodora in 1056.

The *genos* of Phokas was perhaps the single most powerful family within the Anatolian aristocracy in the second half of the tenth century. Family members exercised the position of *Domestic of the Schools*, the highest military position in the tenth century, nearly continuously between the end of 944 until 972, and again from 978 into 986 or 987.[16] This was due both to the family's independent influence in the eastern provinces of the empire and to the close relationship the family enjoyed with members of the imperial dynasty founded by Basil I.[17]

In 963 Nikephoros Phokas made his bid for the throne with the support of the military, especially those troops coming from central and eastern Anatolia. Though not unique in Byzantine history, Nikephoros II incorporated a large number of relatives into his imperial administration. One of his first acts as emperor was to raise his father, Bardas, to the exalted rank of *Caesar*.[18] His nephew, the future Emperor John I Tzimiskes, was made *Domestic of the Schools of the East*, while his brother, Leo, also held an important, if perhaps ill-defined, position at his court.[19]

Nikephoros's reign came to a violent end on the night of December 11, 969, when a group of conspirators, including the emperor's nephew John Tzimiskes, snuck into his bedroom and cut him down where he lay. Tzimiskes, like many of Nikephoros II's relatives, initially held an important military command during his uncle's reign, but he was later removed from his post.[20] The emperor's wife, Theophano, was also involved in the plot, a fact that was long (and disproportionately) remembered in Byzantium.[21]

The place of John I Tzimiskes within the *genos* of the Phokades, or lack thereof, in surviving sources is illustrative. His close relation to Nikephoros II Phokas was frequently noted, but anything written after December 969 also had to deal with the reality of John's involvement in Nikephoros's violent death. Hence Leo the Deacon, apparently with the aid of hindsight, initially distances John Tzimiskes from Nikephoros Phokas's "blood relatives and other associates," despite John's well-known status as Nikephoros's nephew.[22] This very status is then emphasized in a second passage.[23] Even the name by

**16** For a more complete list, see Cheynet, "Les Phocas," 312–14.

**17** Cheynet, "Bureaucracy and Aristocracies," 519.

**18** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 260, trans. Wortley, 250.

**19** Liudprand of Cremona, *Relatio de legatione Constantinopolitana ad Nicephorum Phocam*, 451 and 458, ed. Paolo Chiesa, Corpus Christianorum 156 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998).

**20** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 292, trans. Wortley, 279.

**21** See, for example, Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry from Pisides to Geometres*, 305–10 (Appendix III); Emile Turdeanu, *Le Dit de Nicéphore II Phocas et son épouse Théophano. Texte slave et traduction française* (Thessaloniki: Association hellénique des études slaves, 1976).

**22** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 3.2, trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 89.

**23** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 3.3, trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 89–90.

which John was known singles him out from his illustrious kin. Tzimiskes's sobriquet, which never became a family name, is unusual and its precise meaning continues to be debated among scholars.[24] It is a curious case, considering John's lineage would have given him the right to employ one of several prominent family names, including both Phokas and Kourkouas.[25] It is possible that John either chose to be known by Tzimiskes or was given the appellation by authors writing after the death of Nikephoros II (or both) as a deliberate attempt to dissociate him from those family members whom he had betrayed.

Emperor Basil II (r. 976–1025) remains a polarizing figure in modern scholarship. For many scholars of the twentieth century, he represented the strength of a centralizing government pushing back against the self-serving, centripetal interests of the provincial aristocracy.[26] Certainly his reign witnessed the significant expansion of Byzantium's borders and a considerable break with the domestic policies of the previous half century or more. Yet it is also clear that Basil II did not wage a personal war against the entrenched aristocracy.[27] Instead, he simply utilized the support of different families than those who had earlier enjoyed imperial favour.[28] Among them were several families who would go on to become leading members of the later eleventh- and twelfth-century aristocracy, including the Diogenai, Komnenoi, and Dalassenoi.[29]

Between 976 and 989, Basil faced two revolts, which posed a serious threat to his reign. The rebellions were led by representatives of two of the most powerful Anatolian families of their day, the Skleroi and the Phokades. Both Bardas Skleros and Bardas Phokas enjoyed considerable support in the eastern portions of the empire, representing as they did two of the most powerful kinship networks within the Anatolian aristocracy. Initially rivals (Basil used Bardas Phokas in his initial attempts to quell Skleros's rebellion), the two rebels briefly joined forces behind the common goal of ousting Basil II from the throne. They also happened to be related to each other through marriage, despite representing largely opposing blocs within the Anatolian aristocracy, highlighting the complex, interwoven nature of this group.[30]

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**24** Leo the Deacon, *History*, 5.9, trans. Talbot and Sullivan, 141n87. Byzantine authors sought various explanations for it, and they seem generally to have been as bewildered as modern observers.

**25** Andriollo, "Les Kourkouas (IXe–XIe siècle)," *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 11 (2012): 57–87; Cheynet, "Les Phocas."

**26** For an excellent summary of scholarship on Basil II's reign, see Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 16–65.

**27** Cheynet, "Bureaucracy and Aristocracies," 522.

**28** Holmes, "Political Elites in the Reign of Basil II," 35–69; Kamer, "Emperors and Aristocrats in Byzantium;" Stavrakas, "The Byzantine Provincial Elite," 145–46.

**29** Angold, "Belle Époque," 589: Cheynet, "Bureaucracy and Aristocracies," 522.

**30** Skleros's brother, Constantine, was married to Bardas Phokas's sister. According to Leo the Deacon, Bardas Skleros appealed to this relationship when he was tasked with putting down Phokas's first rebellion during the reign of John I Tzimiskes. See Leo the Deacon, *History*, 7.3–4.

Basil was only able to put down the revolts with the aid of troops sent from the Rus' of Kiev.[31]

Aside from these episodes, one of the primary pieces of evidence put forth to support Basil's supposed anti-aristocratic policies comes from a series of imperial acts aimed at curbing the abuse of the "poor" at the hands of "the powerful." Sometimes referred to as the Macedonian land legislation, this series of laws did not originate with Basil II, but he has become most famous for it.[32] One version of an edict issued by Basil II in 996 singles out the Maleïnoi and the Phokades as examples of this "powerful" class, which has contributed to modern interpretations arguing that such families were the primary targets.[33] More recent analyses have shown that a much more complex series of developments were at play than a simple rivalry between emperor and aristocrats, and a close look at the legislation itself quickly reveals that the category of "the powerful" included many more people than simply the military elite (most notably clergy members and monasteries).[34]

Basil II never married and left behind no heirs. Succession was always going to pass to his younger brother, Constantine VIII, who outlived Basil by only three years. Constantine himself had no sons, only daughters. The apparent lack of concern over the line of succession at this point in history has frequently perplexed historians. It is generally explained by comparing Basil's personality and imperial policies with the prevailing cultural norms among the contemporary Anatolian aristocracy, which placed a high value on both military prowess and religious asceticism.[35] He spent much of his long reign at war, not only suppressing revolts but also significantly expanding the empire's borders in both east and west. At the same time, his ascetic religious views and quasi-monastic lifestyle were equally reminiscent of cultural trends among the Anatolian military elite.[36] Indeed, in these aspects, Basil II resembled Nikephoros II Phokas, who was similarly inclined toward asceticism and singularly focused on military ventures.[37] Whatever the reason, for roughly a generation following Constantine VIII's death, imperial legitimacy would rest with his daughters, Zoe and Theodora. This fact would have consequences felt throughout Byzantine society.

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**31** Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 240–98.

**32** McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*.

**33** McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors*, 117 (3A, Version 2). This particular version seems to have been a later re-working of the original legislation, which lends additional weight to the lasting reputation of these two families.

**34** Rosemary Morris, "The Powerful and the Poor in Tenth-Century Byzantium: Law and Reality," *Past and Present* 73 (1976): 3–27.

**35** Tougher, "Imperial Families," 303–26.

**36** Angeliki Laiou, "The General and the Saint: Michael Maleinos and Nikephoros Phokas," in *Ε ΥΨΥΧΙΑ: Mélanges offerts à Hélène Ahrweiler* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1998), 399–412.

**37** Jonathan Shepard, "Equilibrium to Expansion (886–1025)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 522.

## 1028–1056: Imperial Women

The period between 1028 and 1056 is one of seemingly contradictory developments. In 1041/1042, the empire was at its greatest geographic extent since the reign of Heraclius, yet thirty years later it was on the brink of near total collapse. This was a period of cultural flourishing and great monumental building projects, yet the government in Constantinople seems to have struggled through several moments of budgetary crises. The era was almost certainly marked by economic and demographic growth, even if this did not always work to the benefit of the imperial government.[38] New law and philosophical schools were (re-)founded and supported by the imperial government, though they were relatively short-lived.[39] This is reflected in the flurry of interest in marriage impediments among both civil jurists and clergy, which might be understood as a meeting of the growing importance of the *genos* as kin group and the flourishing of legal scholarship and professionalization at the same time.[40]

The combination of Basil II's expansionist, militaristic policies and the death of the last male descendant of Basil I, combined with the rapid turnaround of emperors and theoretically open field of potential suitors, led to increased competition and factionalism among the Byzantine elite. In the past, many scholars wanted to see the major division between these factions as a split between a military aristocracy based in the provinces (especially Anatolia) and a civilian faction representing families whose power and influence was derived largely through bureaucratic service in Constantinople.[41] In fact, by the 1020s, most elite families could count ancestors and relatives both in the provinces and Constantinople who had served the empire in both military and civilian capacities.[42] Despite the model's flaws, the civilian-military split in the eleventh-century aristocracy continues to colour modern treatments of the period.[43] In many ways, the Byzantine aristocracy of the eleventh century was simply more complex than it had been a century earlier.[44] This complexity would only increase with successive measures by several emperors, which opened the ranks of imperial title-holders to a growing merchant class with no connection to the landed aristocracy outside the capital.[45] Factionalism would accelerate yet again after 1056.

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**38** Angeliki Laiou and Cécile Morrisson, *The Byzantine Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 90–165.

**39** This was largely the work of Emperor Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055).

**40** For more on this, see Chapter 2.

**41** Walter Kaegi, "The Controversy about Bureaucratic and Military Factions," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 19 (1993): 25–34.

**42** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*, 209–16.

**43** Angold, "Belle Époque," 588–89; Stephenson, "The Rise of the Middle Byzantine Aristocracy," 22–33.

**44** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*, 345–54; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 338.

**45** Nicolas Oikonomidès, "L'évolution de l'organisation administrative de l'empire byzantin au XIe siècle," *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976): 125–52; Oikonomidès, "Title and Income at the Byzantine Court," 199–215.

A key aspect of change in this period was at the level of emperor, with legitimacy resting with the imperial sisters Zoe and Theodora. Every emperor who sat on the throne between 1028 and 1056 did so through marriage or adoption by one of these two women. This period also witnessed not one but two occasions during which women ruled without a male partner (1042 Zoe and Theodora together, 1055–1056 Theodora alone). It was clear from rather early, however, that this situation would be temporary. Zoe was nearly fifty when she first married, at a time when her father, Constantine VIII, was on his deathbed.[46] Neither she nor her sister were in a position to have children in order to ensure the dynasty's future.

The all-important marriage of Zoe to Romanos III Argyros (r. 1028–1034) was marred by controversy because of their kinship (covered in Chapter 3). Romanos himself is an example of weakness of theories of rivalry between civil and military factions. He came from an old, military family, but one which had been installed in Constantinople for generations (he had held position of *Prefect of the City*).[47] His imperial marriage was not an especially happy one, and Empress Zoe may indeed have been responsible for Romanos's death (as was rumoured), paving the way for her second marriage.[48]

The legitimization for Michael IV's rule (r. 1034–1041) came through his wife, the Empress Zoe, who had taken Michael as a lover before Romanos III's death. He owed his time on the throne, however, largely to his eunuch brother, John the Orphanotrophos, who had risen within the imperial bureaucracy during the reign of Basil II. Michael came from an undistinguished family, which did not sit well with some within the empire's elite. Constantine Dalassenos is said to have "wondered aloud why, when there were so many excellent men of distinguished families and noble birth, a vulgar three pence-a-day man should be preferred above all others and be proclaimed emperor."[49] Despite his humble origins, Michael ruled largely through his family network, entrusting many of the highest positions in his government to relatives.[50]

Emperor Michael V (r. 1041–1042), nephew of Michael IV, was famously derided with the nickname "the Caulker" (*Kalaphates*), a reference to his father's occupation as a ship-builder.[51] The disdain inherent in this reputation was a symptom of the accelerating tendency for elites to establish "noble" lineages and its growing acceptance within various sectors of Byzantine society. Michael V's downfall after so short a reign came at the hands of the Constantinopolitan mob, a reflection of the importance of public opinion and, perhaps, the sovereignty of the people in eleventh-century Byzantium.[52] His most grievous error was his decision to send his adoptive mother, Empress Zoe,

**46** Tougher, "Imperial Families," 307.

**47** Angold, "Belle Époque," 589.

**48** Lynda Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium AD 527–1204* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 136–39.

**49** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 393–94, trans. Wortley, 370–71.

**50** Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 165–74.

**51** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 4.26–29, trans. Sewter, 102–4.

**52** In general, see Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*.

into exile. After almost two centuries of Macedonian rule, the dynasty enjoyed a great deal of imperial credibility and popular loyalty. In both his reputation and the method of his downfall, Michael V illustrates the growing importance of nobility in the minds of both aristocrat and commoner alike, while also reminding the observer that eleventh-century politics were more complicated than just political jockeying among important families.

Zoe's third and final husband was Constantine IX Monomachos (r. 1042–1055), who hailed from an old military family. He enacted a series of reforms aimed at improving the civil administration and simplifying the military.[53] He attempted to present his reign as a time of imperial renewal, including an extensive building program and the patronage of arts and education. Many of the most famous names to come out of the cultural flowering of the eleventh century flourished under Constantine's rule, including Constantine Leichoudes, Michael Psellos, John Xiphilinos, and (their teacher) John Mauropous.

Constantine's reforms were disliked by many and triggered significant opposition. The revolt of his nephew Leo Tornikios in 1047 was especially serious. He was supported largely by troops from Macedonia and Thrace, including other elite families from Adrianople, who were unhappy with Monomachos's focus on eastern campaigns while the Pechenegs were causing serious difficulties closer to home.[54] Constantine IX later bore the brunt of the blame for near-collapse of empire between late 1050s and 1081, both among later Byzantine authors and modern historians, though more recent work has begun to change this opinion.[55] His decision to openly favour his mistress, Maria Skleraina, over his imperial wife, was particularly unpopular.[56]

Empress Zoe had died around 1050, so her sister, Theodora, took the reins of government upon Constantine IX's death in 1055. Theodora was heavily criticized by Michael Psellos, who blamed her excesses for the dire financial straits in which the empire found itself by the end of her reign.[57] Patriarch Michael Keroularios, too, was openly opposed to a female ruler.[58] Both men were motivated by the potential loss of influence behind the throne. Their critiques are coloured by gender stereotypes and betray a sense of unease. During her short reign, there is every indication that she energetically took control of the imperial apparatus, appointing her own supporters to key positions and displaying an eagerness for imperial rule.[59] In any case, after less than a year ruling without a partner, Theodora died in 1056, marking the end of the Macedonian dynasty.

**53** Angold, "Belle Époque," 598; Jacques Lefort "Rhétorique et politique chez Mauropous," *Travaux et Mémoires* 6 (1976): 265–303.

**54** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 338–39.

**55** Angold, "Belle Époque," 600–601.

**56** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 337.

**57** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 6 (Theodora): 2–3, 17.

**58** Angold, "Belle Époque," 602–3.

**59** Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 161–67.

## 1056–1081: The Search for a New Legitimization

1056 is not an especially popular year in which to set a period break in Byzantine history. Most modern treatments select 1025 or 1028, coinciding with the end of the male line of the Macedonian dynasty. Even Michael Psellos placed the end of the Macedonian dynasty in 1028.[60] Yet the loss of imperial legitimization through the Macedonian line after 1056 led to a kind of cold war among aristocracy seeking to establish themselves and their families at the top of the social and political order. Without any legal definition of or protections for those claiming to be of illustrious or "noble" descent, it was left to members of these families themselves to find ways to assert their credentials and, in so doing, to gain the support of other influential families, as well as certain segments of Byzantine society in general. It was precisely at this time that the aristocratic *genos* fully emerged as a unique entity in written sources, complete with its own set of values and vocabulary. Nobility of blood and loyalty to the cohesion of the *genos* came to the fore. Uses of the term itself increased greatly, with a sizeable difference between sources produced before the mid-1050s and those written after.[61]

The period between 1056 and 1081 witnessed numerous losses and failures in the face of external elements. The year 1071 is especially infamous, for it marked the loss of Bari, the last Byzantine holding in Italy, as well as the disastrous Battle of Manzikert fought against Alp Arslan and his Seljuq Turks. External factors combined with internal to produce extraordinary destabilization and atomization within Byzantine society at all levels. There are indications that many provincial *archontes* and the rest of the population sometimes preferred rule by semi-independent warlords (Turkish or others) over the emperor in Constantinople.[62] Even if these outside factors are taken into account, however, it is telling that the fractures created by such pressure formed along familial lines.

Michael VI (r. 1056–1057) was already advanced in age when he was appointed emperor by Theodora on her deathbed. Hailing from the old family of Bringas, Michael, like Theodora, was accused of neglecting the pay of his military officers.[63] This soon resulted in open rebellion. A coalition representing the interests of several families with a long history in the military establishment managed to place Isaac I Komnenos (r. 1057–1059) on the imperial throne. Isaac was actually one of three names put forward by the conspiracy, the other two being Katakalon Kekaumenos and Constantine (X) Doukas.[64]

Although Isaac and his supporters clearly represented the interests of leading figures in the military establishment, their revolt was in direct response to what they viewed as the neglect of the army by Emperor Michael VI, but it was not the expression

**60** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.53.

**61** See especially Chapter 2.

**62** See, for example, Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, 184–99 (revolt of Roussel de Bailleul); Alexander Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, ca. 1040–1130* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 198–243.

**63** Angold, "Belle Époque," 602–3.

**64** Skylitzes, *Synopsis of Histories*, 487, trans. Wortley, 454–55; Psellos, *Chronographia*, 2.136.

of an indelible division between civil and military factions within the aristocracy. Many of the leading figures had been appointed to their posts during the reigns of Romanos III and, especially, Constantine IX.[65] As was often the case, new regimes looked for support among different families than their predecessors, a reminder of the role of the imperial government in perpetuating factionalism within the aristocracy.

Isaac's militaristic image was forever commemorated in his coinage, including a much-discussed issue stamped with an image of the emperor bearing a naked sword.[66] He struggled, however, to follow through in many of his endeavours because of the opposition of entrenched interests in Constantinople. He especially clashed with Patriarch Michael Keroularios, who had initially favoured the new emperor.[67] Isaac was eventually convinced by Keroularios to abdicate in favour of Constantine Doukas. In the words of the continuator of Skylitzes's history, when Isaac I Komnenos was leaving office, "he did not choose his brother John, nor his own nephew Theodore Dokeianos, nor his daughter's husband or some other [man] related to him by blood, but the *proedros* Constantine, who had the surname Doukas."[68] The order of the options given in the text almost certainly reflects Byzantine thinking on the proper order of succession.

The words supposedly spoken by Constantine X upon accepting the imperial sceptres in late 1059 (as recorded by Michael Attaleiates) exemplify the extent to which the language of kinship pervaded the ideology of imperial rule by the mid-eleventh century. "I will not prove false in my contract with him [God] but will be kind and compassionate, a father to the young, a brother to those my age, a cane to the elderly and like a son to them in disposition and imitation of nature."[69] The sources for Constantine's reign focus much attention on the emperor's generosity in granting titles and offices to a large portion of the Byzantine populace, rather than on any special treatment meted out to his family members. Still, there is no question that his brother, the famous *Ceasar* John Doukas, was one of, if not the single most important aid to Constantine during his time in office. Constantine and John also worked to ensure the continuation of the dynasty through Constantine's sons.

The Doukai of the eleventh century claimed direct descent from the family of the same name who rose to prominence in the later ninth and early tenth centuries. The names of

**65** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 339–43.

**66** An example of the coin can be found in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, BZC.1948.17.2961; published in *Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore Collection*, ed. Philip Grierson, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1973), no. 2.7.

**67** Angold, "Belle Époque," 603–5.

**68** *Skylitzes Continuatus*, 108: … βασιλέα προχειρίζεται ού τὸν ὁμαίμονα αὐτοῦ Ἰωάννην, ού τὸν ἀδελφιδοῦν ἑαυτοῦ Θεόδωρον τὸν Δοκειανόν, ούκ ἄνδρα προσζεύξας τῇ οὗτ'ἄλλον τινὰ τῶν πρὸς αἷμα ᾠκειωμένων αὐτῷ, ἀλλὰ τὸν πρόεδρον Κωνσταντῖνον, ᾧ Δούκας τὸ πατρωνυμικὸν ἀνέκαθεν ἦν …

**69** Attaleiates, *History*, 13.2, trans. Kaldellis and Krallis, 129: Ἐγὼ δὲ ούκ ἂν ψεύσαιμι τὰς πρὸς ἐκεῖνον συνθήκας ἀλλ'εύμενὴς καὶ φιλάνθρωπος ἔσομαι, πατήρ τε τοῖς νέοις καὶ τοῖς ἥλιξιν ἀδελφὸς καὶ βακτηρία τοῖς γέρουσι καὶ παῖς τῇ διαθέσει καὶ μιμήσει τῆς φύσεως.

two men in particular were celebrated by members of the eleventh-century Doukai, despite their association with insurrection. Andronikos and Constantine Doukas were rebels, and unsuccessful rebels at that, but they would go on to become two of the most celebrated individuals in Byzantine literature, making appearances in histories, court rhetoric, saints' lives, and even fiction well into the twelfth century.[70] Rather than being remembered as treasonous failures, they were almost universally depicted as heroes.[71] Their popularity seems also to have spread beyond the circle of elites who wrote and read (or heard) our sources to include more of the general populace as well. Additionally, no fewer than six separate miniatures in the famous Madrid Skylitzes manuscript depict scenes from the revolts of Andronikos and Constantine.[72] The Doukai would largely disappear from the historical record following these failed revolts, only to reappear in the eleventh century, when they once again became serious political players. While the precise relationship between the earlier and later Doukai is not clear, the later family consistently claimed to be direct descendants of their tenth-century counterparts.[73] Of course, as we have already seen, there were those among the Doukai's contemporaries, like John Zonaras, who doubted this assertion.[74]

Similar to the tenth century, the aristocracy in this period was once again split between two major groupings, each centred upon one or two leading families.[75] Also like the tenth century, geographic proximity and long-standing alliances or feuds played important roles in the formation of these groupings, though with increased complexity and fluidity. By the late 1060s, the aristocracy was split between one faction centred upon the Doukai (and including the Komnenoi) and another headed by the family of Diogenes. One of the main differences between them concerned their approaches to the Byzantine military. While those led by the Diogenes family sought to continue the empire's reliance on and development of provincial military recruits (thematic units), the Komneno-Doukai looked to increase the use of mercenary elements within the army.[76]

Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes (r. 1068–1071) was raised to the throne through the action of Patriarch John Xiphilinos. Though he had sworn to protect the interests of Emperor Constantine X's son and wife, the patriarch caved to pressure from elements seeking a more proactive strategy to deal with the Turks in eastern Anatolia.[77] Romanos's marriage to

**70** See, for example, *Life of Basil the Younger*, 14–19, ed. and trans. Denis F. Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot, and Stamatina McGrath, *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger: Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Moscow Version* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2014); *Life of Euthymios Patriarch of Constantinople*, 227–28.

**71** Holmes, *Basil II and the Governance of Empire*, 202–10.

**72** *ODB*, 657.

**73** Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.6 and 7.83, trans. Sewter, 326, 333.

**74** See Chapter 4.

**75** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 273–80, 337–57; summarized by Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, 8–11.

**76** Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, 8–9; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 339–57.

**77** Angold, "Belle Époque," 607–9; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 345–50.

Constantine X's widow, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, in 1068 secured his position, as Eudokia became a legitimizing factor reminiscent of the role played by Zoe and Theodora earlier in the century.

True to his reputation and in keeping with his Cappadocian origins, Romanos adopted a strategy of direct confrontation with the Turks in eastern Anatolia.[78] This came to a head in 1071 when the emperor led a large force to the area north of Lake Van, where he encountered a sizeable force led by Sultan Alp Aslan. The ensuing battle at Manzikert proved to be a disastrous defeat for Romanos IV, in large part due to the premature withdrawal of Andronikos Doukas and his troops.[79] Though uncertain, it is possible that the betrayal was part of a plot by the Doukai to regain power.[80] A victory for Romanos IV Diogenes would have been a serious setback for the imperial ambitions of the Doukai.[81] While this defeat may not have been as massive a blow to the Byzantine military as sometimes assumed, the capture of the emperor by a Seljuq sultan and the ensuing year-long civil war allowed nearly the whole of Anatolia to be overrun by various Turkmen and Seljuq Turkish warlords.

Michael VII (r. 1071–1078), the eldest son of Constantine X, had been named co-emperor during his father's reign, but he took control of the empire only after the regencies of his mother and uncle (*Caesar* John Doukas) and of Romanos IV Diogenes. After the defeat and capture of Romanos IV at Manzikert, John Doukas was instrumental in preventing him or his family from taking back control of the empire, ensuring Michael the opportunity to rule. Like Constantine X, historians both Byzantine and modern have generally been unfavourable in their assessments of his reign.[82]

One can detect some aspects of the kind of family rule later associated so strongly with the Komnenian dynasty in Michael VII's time on the throne, as indeed in the reign of his father. This includes the prominent role of his uncle, the *Caesar* John, even if his influence was checked by the infamous court eunuch Nikephoritzes.[83] It has also been argued that the origins of the system of *pronoia*, by which the revenues (largely taxes) from a given region that would otherwise go to the state were granted to an individual in exchange for his service, may be found in the reigns of Constantine X and, especially, Michael VII Doukas.[84] This system would be instrumental, and greatly expanded, under the Komnenian emperors.

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**78** Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion," 329–38.

**79** Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, 155–61.

**80** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 347–48.

**81** Angold, "Belle Époque," 608.

**82** Michael Psellos offers an extremely favourable version of his reign, while Michael Attaleiates is rather critical.

**83** The eunuch had also served Constantine X, but was subsequently sent into exile for a time. Michael VII recalled him, which was an unpopular decision among many, if surviving sources are to be believed. Psellos, *Chronographia*, 7.1–2, 11, trans. Sewter, 367–68, 373.

**84** Mark Bartusis, *Land and Privilege in Byzantium: The Institution of Pronoia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 123–24. Michael is known to have issued a *chrysobull* granting his cousin, Andronikos, full ownership of large tracts of land near Miletos that had previously been

The Doukai's ascendancy within the aristocracy and their attempts to establish a long-lasting dynasty were by no means assured, even after a second member of the family was seated on the imperial throne. Among those who were most instrumental in helping to ensure the continued influence of the family was the *Caesar* John Doukas.[85] Brother to Constantine X and uncle to Michael VII, John Doukas served as a close confidante and advisor during both reigns and helped to secure the very existence of that of his nephew. He was also the grandfather of Eirene, eventual wife of Alexios I Komnenos. As one scholar put it, "there is hardly an important event in Byzantium between the years 1067–81 in which Ioannes [John] Doukas was not associated directly or indirectly."[86] He is mentioned in every major historical narrative written during or shortly after his lifetime.[87] This is due, in part, to the prominence of his family members and the nature of the sources, but it also reflects the *Caesar*'s genuine importance in political events of his lifetime and, perhaps, genuine admiration among his contemporaries.[88] John held the elevated title of *Caesar* (Καῖσαρ) beginning sometime in the reign of his brother, Constantine X.[89] During Michael VII's reign, he has been described as "the driving force behind a weak ruler."[90]

In 1077 dissatisfaction with Michael VII's regime came to a head with the outbreak of two simultaneous revolts, which had a distinctly regional character. Nikephoros Botaneiates, whose family hailed from central Anatolia, drew his support mostly from this same area (in addition to several contingents of Turks). Nikephoros Bryennios, the other contender, was backed almost entirely by prominent figures and troops drawn from Thrace and Macedonia. Adrianople and its hinterland was the centre of his power.[91]

It is at this moment that one clearly sees in the sources a number of prominent families who had intermarried and formed a unified bloc in Adrianople, most notably the families of Bryennios, Glabas, Batatzes, Branas, Tarchaneiotes, and Tornikes.[92] The rebel Leo Tornikios probably had similar support during his rebellion in 1047, but we are much better informed

imperial properties (*episkepseis*). See *Acta et diplomata graeca medii aevi sacra et profana*, ed. Franz Miklosich and Joseph Müller, vol. 6: *Acta et diplomata monasteriorum et ecclesiarum orientis tomus tertius* (Vienna: C. Gerold, 1890), no. 1.37ff.

**85** For an overview of John's role in these key years, see Bernard Leib, "Jean Doukas, césar et moine: Son jeu politique à Byzance de 1067 à 1081," *Analecta Bollandiana* 68 (1950): 163–80.

**86** Polemis, *The Doukai*, 40.

**87** This includes the works of Michael Psellos, Michael Attaleiates, Anna Komnene, Nikephoros Bryennios, and John Zonaras. See Neville, "A History of the *Caesar* John Doukas in Nikephoros Bryennios' *Material for History?*," 171n11 and 12.

**88** A narrative of the *Caesar* John's life can be found in several places, including Polemis' *The Doukai*, 34–41 and in Leib, "Jean Doukas, César et moine," 163–80.

**89** *ODB*, 363.

**90** Polemis, *The Doukai*, 37.

**91** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 351–54.

**92** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*, 345; Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 278–79.

about Bryennios.[93] The appearance of this bloc as a serious political player represents a new development in eleventh-century Byzantium. Several of these families had origins in other parts of the empire or even outside it (e.g. Tornikes), thus demonstrating the ways in which Basil II's expansion and uncertainty in the east of the empire had realigned regional power structures.[94]

Although the alliance with the Doukai was most important, the consolidation of the Komnenoi's power would also be aided by their union with this growing faction of elite families. Two of Alexios I's daughters married members of this Thracian aristocracy, including Anna Komnene's marriage to Nikephoros Bryennios.[95] Despite the fact that the Komnenoi successfully integrated this network of elite families based in Adrianople with themselves, the faction would reappear as an independent, (semi-)oppositional force during the tumultuous reigns of the Angeloi near the end of the twelfth century.[96] It is clear that this group maintained its unique identity throughout the century of apparent integration with the Komnenoi, and that this identity was very much based around their origins in and attachments to the area around Adrianople.

Once in control of the capital, Nikephoros III Botaneiates (r. 1078–1081) sought to solidify his tenuous hold on power by marrying Maria of Alania, the former wife of deposed emperor Michael VII Doukas.[97] Still, in the social and political atmosphere of the late 1070s, Botaneiates was forced to make the case that his own credentials as a member of an illustrious family made him fit to rule the empire. Though his family had been well known among the military establishment for some time, this was not enough for the upstart emperor, and his lineage required slightly more embellishment.

Botaneiates's claim of descent from the Phokades is rightly famous among modern historians.[98] It is, perhaps, likely that Botaneiates himself had chosen to highlight his connection to the family for its connotations of military prowess and the good reputation the Phokades seem still to have enjoyed among the populations of central and eastern Anatolia, from which Botaneiates had drawn much of his support in his bid for the throne.[99] He may also have been reacting to the efforts of the Doukai, who had gone to some effort to enhance the reputation of their own family name while attempting to establish their imperial dynasty.[100]

**93** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 438.

**94** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*, 345, 350–52.

**95** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 202–4. The other daughter, Maria, was married to Nikephoros Euphorbenos Katakalon.

**96** Paul Magdalino, "Constantinople and the '*Exo Chorai*' in the Time of Balsamon," in *Studies on the History and Topography of Byzantine Constantinople*, Variorum 855 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 191–92.

**97** Laiou, "Imperial Marriages and Their Critics in the Eleventh Century," 165 (esp. n. 3).

**98** For more on this, see Chapter 5.

**99** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 84–85, 352–55; Leidholm, "Nikephoros III Botaneiates, the Phokades, and the Fabii," 185–201.

**100** Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 138–39.

From 1078 until the end of the twelfth century, two family names clearly dominated Byzantine politics and society: Doukas and Komnenos. Both families had much earlier origins within the ranks of the aristocracy, but it was in the final two decades of the eleventh century that they began to dominate the rest of the Byzantine elite. Even if their imperial line failed with Michael VII, the fortunes of the Doukai would be ensured into the future because of their intermarriage with the Komnenoi, who would achieve unparalleled success throughout the twelfth century.

## 1081–1180: The Komnenian Century

The interpretation of the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (r. 1081–1118) and the dynasty he founded remains a point of contention among modern scholars, typically dividing opinion along similar lines as (and often in conjunction with) assessments of the empire in the mid-eleventh century.[101] While some have viewed the political reforms of the Komnenoi as revitalizing a struggling empire, others have seen in them the origins of the inevitable collapse that would occur in the years preceding the Fourth Crusade.[102] Whether or not the Komnenian reforms were directly responsible for the preservation or disintegration of the empire, there is no doubt that the dynasty witnessed a century of relative revival, at least in the empire's fortunes vis-à-vis external powers. Three successive, long reigns granted the imperial government a level of stability not seen since the 1020s, even when allowing for several years of turmoil early in Alexios I's reign.

The Komnenoi eventually managed to merge the interests of the state, both administratively and, especially, militarily, with those of the *genos* of Komnenos.[103] Loyalty and service to one was tantamount to loyalty and service to the other. The system of honours and titles, the inflation of which had perhaps caused serious budgetary issues in the mid-eleventh century, was completely remade.[104] A new system of honours built around the title of *sebastos* was reserved for members of the Komnenian extended family and placed above all previously existing titles.[105] This transformation of the Byzantine government, however, was by no means instantaneous upon Alexios's accession.

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**101** Paul Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi (1118–1204)," in *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire, c. 500–1492*, ed. Jonathan Shepard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 627–28, 646–48. The classic interpretation of the Komnenian dynasty in the first half of the twentieth century can be found in Ferdinand Chalandon, *Les Comnène: Étude sur l'empire byzantine aux XIe et XIIe siècles*, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1910–12).

**102** For example, Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 374–75. Ostrogorsky is a good example of a scholar who viewed the Komnenian government as weakening the state apparatus, effectively dooming it in the long term.

**103** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 187.

**104** Alexios I's reform of the system of titles and honours was probably also, at least partially, in response to monetary issues caused by the inflation of the existing system in the middle of the eleventh century. See Angold, "Belle Époque," 597–98.

**105** Paul Magdalino, "Innovations in Government," in *Alexios I Komnenos: Papers of the Second Belfast Byzantine International Colloquium, 14–16 April 1989*, ed. Margaret Mullett and Dion Smythe (Belfast: Belfast Byzantine Enterprises, 1996), 146–66.

Recent work has been critical of the image of Alexios I as a great reformer. Peter Frankopan, for example, has shown how Alexios initially appointed individuals outside of his family circle to the most senior positions in both the military and administrative posts in the empire in the early years of his reign.[106] As it progressed, however, those families outside of the Komnenian circle saw their status and influence greatly reduced as the highest levels of the Byzantine political and social hierarchy were reformed around emperor's family. From the late 1080s onward, military and civilian posts within the imperial bureaucracy would be increasingly monopolized by members of the extended imperial family. And even if Alexios did not immediately reform the government entirely around his close circle of family and supporters, they did play a much greater role than in previous regimes. However slow and piecemeal they may have been, he and the dynasty he founded fundamentally altered both the Byzantine imperial model and the aristocracy as a whole. In both cases, the *genos* of the Komnenoi lay at the centre. The new model of family rule meant that Alexios and his successors virtually eliminated the threat of rivals outside of their circle.[107]

One important aspect of the "family rule" practiced by Alexios I and his successors was the system of *pronoia* grants. These grants of tax revenues in exchange for service to the emperor (especially military service) became a central component of the Komnenian system of governance by the reign of Alexios's grandson, Manuel I. According to Mark Bartusis, four constituent elements marked *pronoia* grants under the Komnenoi as different from earlier forms of remuneration. These include the gift of *paroikoi* (tenant farmers), the "grant of state immovable property," the "attachment of soldiers to the land," and the so-called "lifetime element," meaning that these rights were guaranteed for the lifetime of the grantee.[108] As Bartusis argues, these "had institutional antecedents in earlier Byzantine practices … what made the institution of *pronoia* unique was not the aspects of the grant but the combination of these aspects."[109] Indeed, over the course of Alexios I's reign, for the first time one finds *paroikoi* who paid not only rents, but also taxes to a third party rather than the imperial *fisc*, even on properties owned outright.[110]

The prevailing view among historians of the early twentieth century was that the grant of *pronoia* was functionally equivalent to either a *feodum* or *beneficium* (depending on the scholar) in the contemporary West.[111] This would have meant that Byzantium under Alexios I and his heirs would have effectively transitioned from an administrative state to something of a feudal monarchy, given their extensive use of the institution.

**106** Peter Frankopan, "Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium," *English Historical Review* 122 (2007): 1–34; Peter Frankopan, "Re-interpreting the Role of the Family in Comnenian Byzantium: Where Blood is Not Thicker than Water," in *Byzantium in the Eleventh Century: Being in Between*, ed. Marc D. Lauxtermann and Mark Whittow (New York: Routledge, 2017), 181–96.

**107** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 629–30.

**108** Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 112.

**109** Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 147.

**110** Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 147.

**111** For a summary, see Kazhdan, "*Pronoia*: The History of a Scholarly Discussion," 133–63.

Such views, however, have gradually been replaced as certain aspects of *pronoia* grants have become clearer.[112] In particular, the fact that such grants seem only to have included rights to the tax revenue generated by the lands and *paroikoi* without any concurrent social or legal mastery over them has led more recent scholars to question such comparisons. Even if the grants did eventually become hereditary in practice (in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries), any resemblance to *feoda* or *beneficia* has been largely refuted.[113] Nevertheless, the institution did play a fundamental role in the Komnenian system of government, cementing the bonds between emperor and the network of kin in his service.[114]

The loss of territory in central and eastern Anatolia may actually have facilitated the Komnenoi's efforts to reform the Byzantine aristocracy around themselves.[115] Many of the families who had formerly had their centre of power in these regions were henceforward forced to relocate, typically to the area in and around Constantinople. The Komnenian period, in fact, witnessed a certain heroization and nostalgia for the kind of semi-independent border princes of the tenth century, whose values continued to dominate Alexios I's court. These values were exemplified in romanticized tales like *Digenes Akrites*, the written version of which probably survives from this era.[116] Yet such tales gained in popularity precisely because the social and political milieu recreated in the stories had almost entirely disappeared in the empire. It was still common for families to boast of origins in Anatolia (or just "the east"), but many of them had only actually lived there for two or more generations by the end of Alexios I's reign. The ascension of Alexios I and the Komnenoi should not be viewed as a victory of military over civilian aristocracy, but it was, to certain extent, a victory for the value system familiar from earlier provincial (especially Anatolian) aristocracy.

Alexios I owed his position on the throne in no small part to his marriage to Eirene Doukaina in 1078.[117] The Komnenoi and Doukai were actually united through several marriages which took place during Alexios I's lifetime.[118] Contemporaries, however, were especially focused on the marriage of Alexios and Eirene as the "founders" of this union, especially since it represented an imperial origin.[119] Anna Komnene writes that the Doukai apparently "led the acclamations" when Alexios was formally declared emperor because, Anna tells us, "their kinswoman" was Alexios's wife. "Their [the Doukai's] blood-relatives

**112** Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 2–8.

**113** Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 2–8.

**114** Ostrogorsky, *Pour l'histoire de la féodalité byzantine*; Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 15–60; Bartusis, *Land and Privilege*, 1–7, 610–14.

**115** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 630.

**116** Beaton, "Cappadocians at Court: Digenes and Timarion," 329–38; Magdalino, "Honour among the Romaioi," 183–218.

**117** Frankopan, "Kinship and the Distribution of Power in Komnenian Byzantium," 4.

**118** Michael VII Doukas' sister Zoe, for example, was married to Adrian Komnenos sometime after 1081. See Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 275.

**119** Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 145–50.

willingly followed suit."[120] As argued elsewhere, Anna Komnene's attachment to her mother's *genos* and its memory remained indelible.[121]

The marriage of Eirene to Alexios was politically sound, but the match was not necessarily a natural one. Alexios's mother, Anna Dalassene, is widely regarded as the primary architect of the union, a political manoeuvre frequently praised by modern historians for its strategic brilliance.[122] Anna was forced to ignore her personal enmity toward *Caesar* John Doukas and his family in order to accomplish the long-term success of her family.[123]

In the words of Patlagean, through the union of Eirene Doukaina and Alexios Komnenos, the Komnenoi "succeeded in 1081 where the Phokades and their relatives, the Maleïnoi and Skleroi, had failed in the preceding century."[124] The success of which Patlagean speaks is, in fact, the simultaneous establishment of a long-lasting dynasty and the secure transformation of the aristocracy around the web of marriage alliances centred upon the Komnenoi-Doukai. Interestingly, the fortunes of the *genos* of the Doukai were cemented by Eirene's marriage, which at the same time caused the family to lose its unique identity more or less completely. For the rest of Byzantium's existence (and even beyond), the name itself continued to carry weight as a marker of illustrious status, but nearly always in combination with others (especially Komnenos).[125]

Although John II Komnenos's reign (1118–1143) was generally marked by stability at the highest levels of government, there were instances of strife within the imperial family that hinted at things to come at the end of the twelfth century. Famously, the apparent mistrust and intrigues between John and his sister, Anna Komnene (with her husband Nikephoros Bryennios), have been much discussed.[126] The alleged plot may have included John's own mother, Eirene, who may have favoured the succession of Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene to the throne.[127] The emperor's brother, Isaac, also led an open rebellion in 1130.[128] Isaac fled with his sons to several courts in the east, and despite seeking a rapprochement with John II, his sons (including the future emperor Andronikos I Komnenos) would continue their opposition to John II and his descendants. Several families that would

**120** Komnene, *Alexiad*, 2.7, trans. Sewter, 91–92.

**121** See Chapter 4.

**122** Nikephoros Bryennios depicts Anna as the effective head of the Komnenos family by the time of her husband's death. See Neville, *Heroes and Romans*, 77.

**123** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 25–27, 219, 267.

**124** Patlagean, *Un Moyen Âge grec*, 145. "réussissent en 1081 là où les Phokades et leurs parents Maleïnoi et Sklêroi avaient échoué au siècle précèdent."

**125** The *Anonymous Preface to the Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* records one example of the way descent from the Doukai was seen as reinforcing the imperial legitimacy of the Komnenoi, without being the sole or even primary factor. See Nikephoros Bryennios, *Material for History*, 10.9–13.

**126** For example, Leonora Neville, *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 91–174; Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium*, 19–23.

**127** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 629–30.

**128** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 629–30.

dominate the politics of the coming century, including Angelos and Batatzes, married into the Komnenian family under John's leadership.[129]

John's reign showcases strengths and potential weaknesses of Komnenian government: a single, large family (including affines) had singular access to the heights of political power, but kinsmen could quickly go from supporters to rival claimants, having nearly equal claim to legitimate power. This paradox of keeping government "in the family" was perhaps one reason behind the repeated appearance in Byzantine sources at this time of various ways of emphasizing family unity and shared interests. The praise of the *genos* and the apparent seriousness of expectations of behaviour and support within that group reached new heights under the Komnenoi.[130]

John eventually found himself on his deathbed after a hunting accident and was forced to choose his successor because of the recent deaths of his two eldest sons. The choice came down to the oldest living son, Isaac, who was then in Constantinople, or Manuel, the youngest of the siblings, who was with John in Cilicia. Manuel would eventually win out, although he had to contend with the desires of his brother, Isaac, who coveted the throne, as well as the opposition of John Axouch, John II's close confidante.

Manuel I Komnenos's long reign (1143–1180) has received excellent coverage by Paul Magdalino.[131] Much of our information regarding the Komnenian style of government comes from this period, thanks in part to relatively abundant source material, even if Manuel himself is sometimes portrayed as more autocratic than Alexios I or John II.[132] Manuel extended the system of honours reserved for relatives of the imperial family, for the first time including non-military bureaucrats and even foreign potentates.[133] Nearly every important position in the bureaucracy and military was entrusted to a family member.[134] Manuel also took a great interest in controlling the marriages of those within the extended imperial *genos*, both within and outside of the empire.[135] This included marriage law.[136] Perhaps more than any previous emperor, he made use of marriage diplomacy, especially with western powers.[137] At the same time, Manuel was forced to contend with dissent and potential usurpers from within the imperial family to an even greater extent than his father or grandfather.[138]

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**129** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 208.

**130** Grünbart, *Inszenierung und Repräsention der byzantinischen Aristokratie*, 28–46; Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 99–109.

**131** See esp. Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

**132** Several lists of attendees to imperial synods in particular give the clearest picture of the extent to which family ties determined the hierarchy within the imperial court. See Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 184–85, 501–9.

**133** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 658.

**134** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 217.

**135** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 204–14.

**136** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 105. This was true of Alexios I as well.

**137** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 636–37, 642.

**138** Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 140.

The fact that the empire would disintegrate so quickly after his death has led many to look at his reign for the underlying causes.[139] Manuel has been accused of being overly ambitious and, with his predecessors, of undermining the administrative state.[140] More recent assessments, however, have suggested that Manuel's "power was more impressive and his ambitions more moderate than previously thought."[141]

## 1180–1204: Fragmentation and Collapse

After nearly a century of relative stability and recovery under the first three Komnenian emperors, the empire would once again find itself in a position of near-collapse less than a generation after the death of Manuel I.[142] It has been remarked that, throughout the twelfth century, emperors' reigns were "as successful as they were long."[143] Following Manuel I, no fewer than six emperors ruled in the span of twenty-four years. Whether one blames the system established by the Komnenoi or not, the government had become much more indistinguishable from personal or familial power than previous regimes. With the fracturing of the *genos* that resulted from its expansion over several generations came also the fracturing of the realm. And the *genos* of the Komnenoi indeed suffered a great deal of fracturing and political in-fighting leading up to the disaster of 1204. Much of the political manoeuvring of this period can be described as intra-familial strife.

Upon the death of Manuel I in 1180, control of the empire passed to his son, Alexios II Komnenos (r. 1180–1183). Alexios was still a minor, which left real power in the hands of a regency and opened the door for competitive claims among the extended imperial family. Among them was Manuel I's cousin, Andronikos I Komnenos (r. 1183–1185), who took advantage of a wave of anti-western sentiment (Manuel was viewed as an extreme Latinophile by some).[144] Andronikos had been associated with his father, Isaac, who, with the support of several close family members, had attempted to usurp power during the reigns of John II and Manuel I. Isaac and his household spent many years in forced exile, but during the regency of young Alexios II, Andronikos was able to assert his power under the pretext of protecting Alexios. During his short reign, Andronikos was unpopular and was accused of ruling as a "tyrant" by some contemporaries.[145] His successor, Isaac II Angelos (r. 1185–1195, 1203–1204), was descended from Alexios I's youngest daughter, for which reason he was viewed by many among the Komnenoi as having a weak claim to leadership

**139** This interpretation has been largely influenced by the work of Niketas Choniates, who composed his history of the empire shortly after the fall of Constantinople in 1204. See Choniates, *History*.

**140** Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 374–75.

**141** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 645.

**142** For a more detailed and nuanced perspective on this period, see Simpson, "*The Sad Quarter of a Century?*"

**143** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 627.

**144** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 648–50.

**145** For example, Choniates, *History*, 257–61, 334, 353–54.

of the *genos* and, by extension, the empire.[146] Andronikos I tried to have him arrested, but he killed the agent and fled to Hagia Sophia. A crowd gathered and Isaac took the opportunity to have himself crowned emperor.

This period of instability on the throne saw many provincial areas become centres of opposition to Constantinople. In some cases the leaders were disaffected members of the imperial family, but others were led by members of families below this exalted tier of Byzantine society, instead stemming from the local, provincial class often called *archontes* by Byzantine sources.[147] Two of the most famous cases were that of Theodore Mangaphas in Philadelphia (modern Alaşehir, western Anatolia) and Leo Sgouros in the Peloponnese. Hailing from a military family with ties to the region dating back to at least the eleventh century, Mangaphas succeeded in asserting his independence around Philadelphia between 1188 and 1190.[148] The Mangaphas family had especially strong ties to the area of Philadelphia, and this continued to be the case even after his failed revolt, as suggested by the *typikon* of the monastery of Skoteini.[149] Sgouros, with the help of his brother, similarly maintained his independence in southern Greece for several years beginning around 1198.[150] Their ambitions of expanding their control to other parts of Greece were stifled as much by the opposition of other regional powers (e.g. Michael Choniates, archbishop of Athens) as by the central government in Constantinople.

The revolts of Mangaphas and Sgouros were disturbing to the central government not because of their severity or scope, but because of what they represented about the interests of the provinces.[151] In both cases, the leaders of these revolts sought regional autonomy rather than imperial usurpation, and they acted as champions of the local populations. In earlier periods, acknowledging the authority of the emperor was still taken for granted, even while certain regions and families clearly developed a sense of themselves largely independent of Constantinople. This seems no longer to have been the case in the closing decades of the twelfth century. The extensive use of the system of *pronoia*, greatly extended under Manuel I, combined with other developments (economic growth, the inability of the government to protect against raids/invasions, and

**146** Konstantinos Varzos, *Η γενεαλογία των Κωμνηνών*, vol. 2 (Thessaloniki: Center of Byzantine Studies, 1984), 807–40.

**147** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 454–56. Another member of the imperial family, Isaac Komnenos, effectively wrested control of Cyprus from the government of Anronikos I. Isaac, however, seems clearly to have desired to seize control of the throne in Constantinople, making his revolt more similar to those seen throughout the eleventh century.

**148** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 454–55.

**149** Probably founded in the late twelfth century, the monastery was located somewhere in the vicinity of Philadelphia. At the time of the *typikon's* composition in 1247, the nun Athanasia Mangaphaina, almost certainly related to Theodore Mangaphas, was in residence there. See *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, vol. 3, 1176–95.

**150** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 454–56.

**151** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 454.

instability in Constantinople) to create the sense that, by the 1180s at least, the central government needed the provinces more than the provinces needed Constantinople.[152]

To a certain extent, the groundwork for this kind of regional separatism may have been laid already in the eleventh century. Cheynet addressed this possibility in some of his work, although he largely dismissed it. He argued that there was a fundamental difference between the revolts of the late twelfth and early thirteenth century (which he terms regional separatism) and the kind of regional factionalism seen in the eleventh century.[153] Indeed, it is difficult to point to a single example in the eleventh century of an individual who took up arms against the emperor with the expressed purpose of breaking a certain city or region away from the empire (unless one includes rogue imperial agents like Philaretos Brachamios or Roussel de Bailleul).

At the same time, however, a certain devolution of loyalties, or at least identities, might just be visible in eleventh-century sources. Even in the tenth century, powerful families generally derived much of their support from their home regions, displaying an attachment to these provincial areas that was often reciprocated by the local populations (including, importantly, soldiers). At no time during this period can one speak of private armies wielded by the provincial aristocracy per se, but it is not inaccurate to imagine soldiers from certain regions feeling more loyalty to their generals from the same regions than to the imperial throne, at least during periods of civil strife.[154] A distinct regionalism also becomes visible in provincial architecture in the eleventh century, at the same time that private family chapels were preferred not only by aristocratic families, but seemingly more generally.[155] Towns and regions in the empire developed their own sense of identity alongside powerful families.

Alexios III (r. 1195–1203) was the elder brother of Isaac II, and his deposition of his younger brother was condemned by many contemporaries.[156] The episode also led to Isaac's young son seeking asylum in the West, which would give crusaders the pretext they needed to divert their path to Constantinople in the coming years. The coup that led to Alexios III's sole control of the empire in 1195 was supported primarily by five families within the umbrella of the Komnenoi: Palaiologos, Branas, Kantakouzenos, Raoul, and Petraliphas.[157] The union of many elite families with the *genos* of the Komnenoi did not eliminate their unique identities or the potential for the same kind of factionalism that had remained constant from at least the tenth century. In a display of his own political leanings, Alexios preferred to be known by the name Komnenos rather than Angelos, which was firmly associated with Isaac II.[158] By the end of the twelfth century, most individuals in the highest social strata could lay claim to several surnames, each with their

**152** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 654–55.

**153** Cheynet, *Pouvoir et contestations*, 454.

**154** Cheynet, "L'aristocratie byzantine (VIIIe–XIIIe siècle)," 315–17.

**155** Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*, 39–41; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*.

**156** See, for example, Choniates, *History*, 453–54, 532.

**157** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 662.

**158** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 662.

own illustrious background. The choice of which of those names one utilized or had ascribed to them carried layers of its own meaning.[159]

The marriages arranged for Alexios III's children would prove key to the establishment of several families who would find themselves in power after the conquest of Constantinople in 1204. One of Alexios's daughters was married to a Palaiologos, greatly increasing that family's standing. It would lead to their eventual ascendancy in Nicaea and Constantinople after 1261. Another daughter married a member of the Laskaris family, which would assist in their initial control in Nicaea. Cousins of the emperor established themselves in Thessaloniki, later controlling the so-called Despotate of Epirus.[160]

## Conclusion

The empire looked very different in the late twelfth century than it had in the middle of the tenth. Yet there is little in the sources to suggest too radical a change at any given moment. Social, cultural, and political change in this period, including the political reformations undertaken by the Komnenian emperors, tended to be in degree, not kind, and broad consistencies and continuities are clearly visible. The Komnenoi integrated pre-existing ideals and norms from within the aristocracy, gradually formalizing them into government structures. Though the Komnenoi are most famous for it, numerous emperors utilized close family members and other relatives in important posts within the imperial administration and military. Nikephoros II Phokas, Michael IV, Constantine X, and Michael VII Doukas anticipated the kind of "family rule" used so extensively by the Komnenoi in the twelfth century. The Komnenian *genos* and the values surrounding it would have been readily recognizable to the Phokades of the tenth century.

Unsurprisingly, many of the most significant changes in the language and aristocratic ideals of sources were dictated by changes in emperor and models of legitimacy; this seems to have had far-reaching effects on the Byzantine aristocracy at large, even if the period from the eleventh century onward was simultaneously marked by a certain atomization in identity and group loyalties. If sources produced in the second half of the eleventh century display marked differences to those produced in the first half, in particular in their focus on illustrious ancestry and detail regarding individual *genē*, the end of the Macedonian dynasty in 1056 had a lot to do with it. It cannot be forgotten that the Byzantine aristocracy was never independent from the influence of the emperor. Real power and both social and political ascendancy was always within the imperial power structures. Nearly all cases of rebellion were carried out by men who had been appointed generals of the military, and there no evidence that household retainers could match imperial soldiers, even among the most powerful of provincial families.[161] The language and ideologies of the imperial throne likewise spread into

**159** See the comments of Ruth Macrides, *George Akropolites, The History: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41, 107n1.

**160** Magdalino, "The Empire of the Komnenoi," 662–63.

**161** Kaldellis, *Streams of Gold, Rivers of Blood*, 13–18.

the ranks of those in the imperial administration and positions of influence outside of Constantinople.

Land ownership and imperial office or title formed the basis of the aristocracy's wealth, but intermarriage was the glue that held together various factions among these families and helped to reinforce their sense of nobility and social cohesion. As time progressed, factions were increasingly built around extended family units (*genē*) and reinforced through marriage. Factionalism relied on shared interests, occasionally long-standing feuds or alliances, and geography. Byzantine sources take for granted the efficacy of bonds of kinship, and they are seldom presented as subversive or a threat.[162] Revolts or other plots carried out by family members are nearly universally presented as either the height of betrayal or motivated by a concern for the greater good of the family as a whole.

The Byzantine aristocracy became progressively more complex from the late tenth century onward, expanding its ranks to include an ever more diverse array of individuals and families from a variety of backgrounds. Older models of a rift between civilian and military factions do not hold up to careful scrutiny of the sources, but Kazhdan's idea of the "aristocratization" of high Byzantine culture probably holds some truth.[163] The ideals and practices of the Komenian emperors and those surrounding them developed largely out of the culture of the tenth-century Anatolian aristocracy.[164] Still, this was not a revolutionary transformation, and, like the government reforms of the Komnenoi, represents less a cultural revolution and more a change in emphases and predominant ideologies.

Certain echoes of the political fragmentation that occurred around 1204 and its aftermath were already visible in the eleventh, perhaps even the tenth century. This is not to suggest a direct, causal relationship between eleventh-century developments and the collapse on either side of the Fourth Crusade. Still, with the benefit of hindsight, it is uncontroversial to suggest that there were some indications of a potential political breakdown in Byzantium well before the crusaders were on their way to Constantinople. Some aspects of this foreshadowing just might be traceable all the way back in the eleventh century. In particular, the gradual amplification of the emphasis on loyalty to the *genos* as kin group rather than the *genos* of the Romans and regional centres (*patrides*) taking pride of place above the *patris* of the Roman Empire and/or Constantinople.

If the Komnenoi had managed to merge the interests of the *genos* of Romans with the *genos* of Komnenoi, the period after 1204 might be understood as the victory of *genos* as kin group. High-minded claims of service to the interests of the *genos* of the Romans in rhetoric or other media had little basis in reality, even after Michael VIII Palaiologos's triumphant return to Constantinople in 1261. Henceforward, the interests of and service to one's family ranked among the highest priorities and formed the core of aristocratic identity.[165]

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**162** Andriollo, *Constantinople et les provinces d'Asie Mineure*, 413.

**163** Kazhdan and Epstein, *Change in Byzantine Culture*.

**164** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 420–21.

**165** Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni*, 11–12.

# CONCLUSION

THE PREVIOUS PAGES have shown that it is possible to define the *genos* in such a way that is broadly consistent with Byzantine sources and that this definition, however imperfect, allows for a greater degree of precision in modern studies of Byzantine kinship and society. Changes in the vocabulary of kinship between the ninth and thirteenth centuries attest the central place of the *genos* in the Byzantine understanding of kinship, and its importance steadily increased over this time. The *genos* was the principal form of the singular family in questions of marriage law, and debates in marriage law in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium were framed as debates over the nature of the *genos* itself. The increased role of the *genos* corresponded with a renewed interest in the ties of blood, which was itself related to the greater role of genealogical ties as determining factors in social standing from the mid-eleventh century. The heritable surname was perhaps the single most important development for the aristocratic *genos* in the period covered in this study. The surname, as the outward marker of one's *genos*, encapsulated the family's reputation and was more likely than most other properties to survive intact from one generation to the next. The power of the family name could even outlast the social or political relevance of members of the *genos* itself.

The *genos* was not an amorphous, poorly defined "extended family" in medieval Byzantium. Sources of diverse genres across the entire period covered by this study offer a relatively clear definition of the kin group, which is broadly consistent across time and space. Yet this does not mean that the *genos* did not alter in form or function over the period covered by this book. Rather, the concept remained stable in its most fundamental aspects, while change occurred in the precise role it played in the political and social lives of the Byzantine elite and its relative importance in society more broadly.

The Byzantine *genos* was the expression of the consanguineous family, effectively immune to changes or additions through means other than biological reproduction. This includes the act of marriage, in which each spouse maintained their identity as members of their natal *genos* even as their union marked the beginning of a new *genos* (after the birth of their children). For members of the social and political elite in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the *genos* was marked by a heritable surname, but a family name was not a prerequisite for the existence of or membership in a *genos*, especially for those who did not rank among the aristocracy.

At its most basic level, the *genos* was a universal feature of Byzantine society. Everyone, regardless of social standing, was part of a *genos*. While the *oikos*/household might indeed have been the most widespread social unit on the ground at any time in Byzantium's history, the *genos* formed the fundamental bonds underlying the household and represented the most basic form of kinship, upon which all these other forms of the family were built. Of course, the many features that distinguished the twelfth-century aristocratic *genos* from earlier aristocratic kin groups also separated it from the *genos* to which non-elite members of twelfth-century society could lay claim.

Though the sources are sometimes imprecise in their language, the *genos* was distinct from the *oikos* in numerous aspects. Unlike the *oikos*, the *genos* was not defined in

whole or in part by shared living space. The ties that bound members of a single *genos* were biological, or at least imagined as such, rendering slaves or other "men" attached to the household ineligible for membership in the *genos*. The *oikos* was held together by a singular head of household, to whom all its members were bound. No such position existed within the *genos*, which lacked any formal leadership role embodied by any one member. The *genos* indeed encompassed a larger number of relatives than the average *oikos*, but the two groups do not exactly correspond to the nuclear versus "extended" family. In fact, to claim any sort of dichotomous opposition between the *oikos* and the *genos* would be to misunderstand the nature of both.

It may be useful to regard Byzantium, at least in the period covered here, as a society of two families. Every individual belonged to both an *oikos* and a *genos* simultaneously. These two forms of "the family" in Byzantium had fundamentally different definitions, foci, and values, but there is little to indicate any sort of competition between the two, or that the *genos* gained in importance at the expense of the household. The choice of which form of family was most important would have depended on circumstance. The *genos* was most relevant in issues of politics, social standing, and questions of marriage, while the *oikos* moved to the fore in such spheres as affective family relationships and daily life, as well as economic production. Certainly by the eleventh century, if not earlier, the *genos* cannot be said to have been any less vital or fundamental to Byzantine society than the *oikos*.

There is little indication that the *genos*, in contrast to the *oikos*, had anything approaching a rigid, hierarchical structure. The sources do occasionally allude to individuals acting as a kind of head of the family, but such instances seem to be highly circumstantial, and it is not clear to what extent all members of the *genos* would have recognized this leadership either in a single moment or, especially, over the long term. One of the primary responsibilities of this head of the family would have been the arrangement of marriages, especially for female members of the *genos*. This, in fact, would partly explain the marriage policies of Manuel I Komnenos, who is known to have involved himself in the marriages of nearly the entire aristocracy in his day. This aristocracy was built around the *genos* of the Komnenoi, so Manuel's actions might be understood as in keeping with an older tradition of *genos* leadership rather than an innovation in imperial marriage policy. Unsurprisingly, it is most often older men who seem to play these leadership roles within the *genos*, but qualifications of age and gender seem to have been driven more by broader cultural values rather than any sort of power dynamic specific to the *genos*. Women could and did act in this role, as Anna Dalassene famously did prior to and during the reign of her son, Alexios I, though such instances remain rare.[1]

The shared vocabulary of ethnic or national identity with that of the *genos* as family was more than a mere linguistic coincidence. The *genos*, on any scale, appears as the clearest and perhaps strongest indicator of collective identity at any time covered by this study. The marked increase in the concept's employment as the preferred term for the singular family thus indicates the greater importance of the *genos* (and thus one's

1 Anna Komnene goes to great pains in the pages of her *Alexiad* to make her grandmother's exercise of authority seem legitimate. See Komnene, *Alexiad*, 3.5–8.

kinsmen) as the locus of personal loyalty and identity, especially among the elite, from the mid-eleventh century onward. Ideals of loyalty and expectations of mutual support that had been associated with the *genos* of the Romans or of the Christians for centuries also characterized the *genos* as kin group by the eleventh or twelfth centuries. The combined evidence suggests a gradual shift in the values of the Byzantine elite, in which the loyalty and values related to the *genos* of the Romans was, partially at least, co-opted by the *genos* as kin group.

Byzantine authors had at their disposal a number of different terms to express the singular family, many of which appear as (rough) synonyms for the *genos* (especially *genea* and *phylon*). The fact that both the authors of written sources and members of the aristocracy themselves (judging by surviving lead seals) settled on *genos* by the mid-eleventh century, then, is not insignificant. Surely they were well aware of the preexisting connotations of the term. The continuing identification of certain *genē* with specific places of origin (*patrides*), combined with the linguistic and conceptual correspondence of the *genos* as family group with the *genos* as ethnic group, suggests that future studies may even show that the devolution of loyalties and political fracturing that became so visible during the separatist uprisings of the 1180s and after 1204 may be detectable already in the eleventh century.

Legal sources concerning marriage impediments unequivocally attest that the *genos*, not the *oikos*, was the form of the family concerned in this context. Debates over the extension of marriage impediments following the issuance of the Tome of Sisinnios in 997. The participants in these debates, which stretched over much of the eleventh century, constructed their arguments on the premise that their task was to find the natural limits of shared blood, marking the outer limits of the singular family. Byzantine thinkers present impediments to consanguineous marriages as determining the outer limits of the *genos*, but it is difficult to say with any certainty the extent to which such limits mattered in the *genos*'s social and political role outside of marriage arrangements.

Twelfth-century legal debates over marriage impediments confirm the impression given by other sources that spouses maintained their identity as members of their natal *genos* even after the marital union. This fact was relevant beyond such theoretical discussions, as various sources display numerous examples of adults, both men and women, identifying themselves with their parental *genos* throughout their lives and acting on its behalf. In those rare instances in which one can see a woman's perspective preserved directly in the sources, they seem to have generally placed their relationship with their parents and their natal *genos* slightly above that with their husband, at least in the ways in which they chose to self-identify.

Descent within the Byzantine *genos*, like inheritance, was reckoned bilaterally. Nevertheless, some individuals may not have recognized a woman's ability to pass on lineage as completely as did men, as attested by John Zonaras's critique of Constantine X Doukas's ancestry. While such sentiments are admittedly rare in contemporary Byzantine sources, the fact that Zonaras chose to employ this method to discredit the emperor presupposes an audience ready to believe him. Male ancestors are certainly more visible in the sources and apparently more influential in the construction of a

*genos*'s identity, but it cannot be said that the Byzantine *genos* was either patrilineal or that it favoured primogeniture in any sense.

Some authors may have been influenced by Galenic or Aristotelian (or other) ideas concerning human reproduction in their favouring of male-line (agnatic) descent, as the growth in importance of the *genos* among the Byzantine elite brought with it a renewed interest in the nature of ties of blood. According to Byzantine thought, the significance of shared blood and heritable traits may have extended beyond that of modern genetics, yet it was nevertheless understood to be governed by nature and, thus, comprehensible through the natural sciences. This may go some way toward explaining the surprisingly prominent role played by medical texts and authorities in discussions of kinship in sources as diverse as legal commentaries and letters. It could equally open new lines of inquiry for future studies of kinship in Byzantium and the Mediterranean world.

Heritable surnames were not only the most visible (and perhaps the most important) markers of *genos* affiliation among the Byzantine elite, they were also among their most valuable assets. The development of family names gave a public identity to aristocratic *genē*, which in turn became the locus of the family's reputation. Reputation, both individual and collective, was vital to social standing and political efficacy in Byzantium in most periods, but this was especially true from the mid-eleventh century onward. Unlike imperial titles, land, or other properties, heritable surnames were immune to confiscation by the emperor or his agents. Nor were they subject to diminution over several generations due to partible inheritance practices. Byzantine authors frequently refer to individuals only by their surname, which would have served to reinforce the perception that an individual's actions and identity were firmly intertwined with that of his or her *genos*.

The maintenance and dissemination of their family's reputation among both members of the aristocracy and the general populace was thus a foremost concern for members of an elite *genos*. Lead seals, histories (including traces of now lost family histories), court rhetoric, and even saints' lives preserve written records of the Byzantine aristocracy's efforts to this end. As in the examples of the Phokades and the Doukai, such efforts could be so successful that the image evoked by the surname could far outlast the independent power and identity of the family itself.

The aristocratic *genos* of the mid-twelfth century was in many ways distinct from the aristocratic family in the ninth, but there is little evidence to support any kind of revolutionary change in fundamental kinship structures.[2] In keeping with the findings of several scholars, and repeating a pattern found also in studies of medieval Europe, the development of the aristocratic *genos* in medieval Byzantium was a gradual one, whose origins, in some sense, lie much earlier than the tenth century. In the period covered

**2** This argument is indeed similar to that made by Constance Bouchard regarding noble families in medieval France. "Hence I would like to propose, rather than a changeable sort of noble family consciousness that underwent marked transformations from the tenth to the eleventh centuries, a relatively conservative form of family structure that was continuously open to new individuals and new lineages but incorporated these into its preexisting structures." See Bouchard, *Those of My Blood*, 178.

here, there was a shift, however gradual, toward a greater sense of belonging to a *genos* and a clear growth in that fact's importance in social and political contexts. By the twelfth century at least, there is ample evidence that the line between the in-group and others had grown sharper, and there were more or less generally accepted rules governing who was a member of the *genos*, how they earned that distinction, and what was expected of them as a result.

The gradual nature of the development of the *genos* is also visible in the language of the sources. Those written prior to the mid-eleventh century display a larger degree of linguistic variation when describing such family groups than those that come later (which overwhelmingly prefer *genos*), suggesting that the *genos* went from simply one of many terms denoting a kin group to the preferred method of denoting the consanguineous family, and the word is more than twice as likely to appear in sources written after 1050 as those written just half a century earlier. Yet, already in the second half of the ninth century some of the language that would become closely associated with the *genos*, notably nobility "by blood," is present in the sources, if on a much more limited scale than in the later eleventh or, especially, the twelfth century. Indeed, with only a few exceptions, the language of kinship in general displays a large degree of continuity and stability over the entire period studied here. The most important variation seems to have been with the use of the term *genos* itself, which would become the core of a specialized vocabulary that developed into a codified system of values.

The eleventh century indeed appears to be a moment of accelerated change, although that change seems largely to have been cultural. Some of the main characteristics of the *genos* (e.g. an emphasis on shared blood and famous lineage or the use of a surname) are much more pronounced in the 1090s than they had been in the first decade of the century. The relatively weak leadership offered by many emperors in Constantinople in the eleventh century almost certainly contributed to the growth of the power and independence of aristocratic families, just as the quickening economy and the availability of imperial titles or offices to the burgeoning merchant class quickened the aristocracy's efforts to present itself as a nobility of blood and ancient privilege. The ideals and values of the *genos* were elevated and elaborated alongside the rise of this aristocracy's influence at the highest levels of Byzantine politics and society. This process probably accelerated after 1056, when those vying for (and achieving) the imperial throne began to rely on the prestige of their *genos* and the political connections achieved through marriage alliances, rather than a connection to the Macedonian dynasty, for legitimacy and effectiveness as ruler. This not only brought the politics of blood and reputation to the highest office in the empire, it also encouraged those not already associated with the throne to display their own *genos*'s worth and to further its collective interests, as it became increasingly clear that this had become the path to both political and social elevation.

Despite its importance in the politics of the eleventh century and later, the *genos* never received legal recognition (beyond marriage legislation) or official status in the Byzantine administration. Under the Komnenian emperors, especially Manuel I, the *genos* came closest to achieving some sort of semi-institutionalized status. This was a result of the fact that membership in the *genos* of the Komnenoi had become a *sine qua non* for members of the social and political elite, as well as the fact that the order of

precedence at the imperial court came to be determined by closeness (in kinship terms) to the emperor. Paul Magdalino has already shown the ways in which kinship designations effectively took the place of imperial titles at the court of Manuel I Komnenos.[3]

The Komnenian reforms and family-based politics are alternately praised for contributing to the Byzantine resurgence in the twelfth century or blamed for the system's ultimate failure in the 1180s and 1190s. In the short term, there is little doubt that the Komnenoi succeeded because they pulled in potential rivals into their *genos*, which then formed basis of the imperial (and aristocratic) power structure.[4] At the same time, the very strength of the bond of consanguinity and the success of Komnenian efforts to absorb the aristocracy within their extended family resulted in the dynasty's eventual downfall, as the late twelfth century saw the appearance of numerous rival claimants with equally acceptable claims to the throne.[5] Still, if the Komnenoi succeeded to any degree in revitalizing an empire on the brink of total collapse, it was in no small part due to their ability to harness the unifying power of the *genos*.

By the end of the twelfth century, the Byzantine *genos* was a politically effective social group based upon ties of consanguineous kinship, but, importantly, it was also a cultural construct, an idea that held very real power, yet defies easy categorization. If a member of a prominent *genos* would have had trouble listing all the other members of that *genos*, it does not diminish the significance of the concept. As in other identity sets, its functionality could be circumstantial. The *genos* was a point of reference for individual and group identity, a microcosm, however imperfect, of the *genos* of the Romans to which one might refer in order to demonstrate social standing or to establish a common goal amongst others. Like the *genos* of the Romans, the *genos* as kin group called its members to act for the common good of the group and to participate in its reputation. This impulse had become particularly strong and widespread by the end of the period covered by this study, and it is in this sense that the aristocratic *genos* of the twelfth century looks remarkably different from predominant forms of the family in earlier periods.

**3** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, especially Appendix 2, 501–9.

**4** Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 187.

**5** Hill, *Imperial Women in Byzantium*, 140.

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